'TILDA JANE'S ORPHANS

MARSHALL SAUNDERS

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'TILDA JANE'S ORPHANS

Works of

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L. C. PAGE AND COMPANY

New England Building, Boston, Mass.

"'IF THERE AIN'T A PUP IN MY OLD DAD'S CHAIR.'"
(See page 106.)

'TILDA JANE'S ORPHANS

By

Marshall Saunders

Author of "'Tilda Jane," "Beautiful Joe," "Beautiful Joe's Paradise," etc.

Illustrated by

JOHN GOSS

"Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy."

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PREFATORY NOTE

When the story of "'Tilda Jane" appeared serially in "The Youth's Companion" in 1901, the original manuscript was very much condensed. When the time for book publication arrived nearly all the omitted matter was restored. However, some incidents were still left out, and they have formed the beginning of a new story written to please the many boys and girls who have expressed a wish to know something more of the fortunes of the orphan and her dogs. In this new story a statement made by the editor at the conclusion of the serial in "The Companion" has been ignored, namely that 'Tilda Jane grew up and married her friend and benefactor Hank. This statement was not in the original manuscript, and it has seemed advisable to keep 'Tilda Jane for the present a young girl and the adopted sister of the good-natured Hank, without looking too far into the future.

That the orphan's old friends will follow with interest, her often groping and stumbling, yet never-

wearying steps along the path of uplift for human beings and dumb creatures, is the earnest hope of the author. That she should be awakened to a new interest in life, namely the care of birds who are perhaps the weakest and most defenceless of God's creatures, seemed a fitting addition to her character.

Another matter perhaps worth mentioning — Milkweed, the horse, has been made of a sociable disposition, for an acute critic observed that one lack in horse stories is that the great sociability of their natures is not properly accentuated.

MARSHALL SAUNDERS.

HALIFAX, SEPT. 20, 1909.

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'TILDA JANE'S ORPHANS

CHAPTER I

HANK HAS A LAUGHING FIT

"W'AT you laughin' at?" asked the Frenchman softly.

Receiving no answer, he continued to stare at the fat, young man who was doubled up over the garden gate in a convulsion of amusement.

"W'at you laughin' at?" he presently repeated, and his gaze went from the young man to the little, snow-bound cottage behind him. "It's cole to-night — air like snaps, an' you with no beeg fur coat on — nor hat," he added in his ruminating way.

Hank Dillson straightened himself, and, still shaking with laughter, nodded over his shoulder toward the cottage.

"I'm a-laughing at what is going on in there, and I don't feel the cold because I've got a coating of flesh on my bones, since I came home, so thick that Jack Frost can't get at me in less than an hour — come on here. You've been a good neighbour to us for years. Come and look in this window. I ain't going to tell everyone, but there's no harm in your knowing. Hist now!" and he led the way softly over the frozen path, between heaped-up snow banks, to the back of the cottage.

Pausing a few feet from the kitchen window, he said, "Look now — see, stare. Ain't that what you call 'cute?"

The Frenchman saw nothing amusing. The owner of the cottage — old Mr. Dillson, Hank's father — sat in his big chair by the kitchen fire. His elbow was on the arm of the chair, his white head rested on his hand. He seemed to be sunk in a reverie. He usually sat in that position. The Frenchman saw nothing "'cute" about him.

'Tilda Jane — the little, lean, shrewd girl who kept house for the two Dillson men — sat in a small rocking-chair, her dark face expressing very little emotion of any kind, though the Frenchman imagined that her gaze was bent in slightly puzzled inquiry on the third figure in the room.

This third person was quite unknown to the Frenchman. She was a great, lumbering, over-

grown girl or woman, who might be any age from eighteen to twenty-five. While 'Tilda Jane and the old man sat slightly back from the fire, this huge girl had drawn up close to it, and her enormous feet in their men's shoes rested boldly on the hearth.

"Now, ain't she 'cute," reiterated Hank, choking back an explosive guffaw. "A regular cow moose — Poor 'Tilda — poor, young sister."

"I don' understan'," drawled the Frenchman with a mystified gesture. "This a frien' who visit?"

"Friend, no!" exclaimed Hank, clapping his hand over his mouth. "Come on off here, and I'll explain," and he dragged the Frenchman hurriedly along the path, and again burst into a fit of merriment.

"It's still cole," said the Frenchman patiently, "come, will you, in my house, an' we can talk."

Hank, making a frantic effort to control himself, followed the Frenchman, who half puzzled, half flattered, for his American neighbour rarely had time, or took time to visit him, led the way to his own kitchen.

There, as usual, sat grandfather and grandmother by the fire. Some children and two dogs played about the room, while the house-mother sat knitting amidst a certain amount of uproar.

One lad, the eldest of the family, stood in a

corner squeaking on a violin, and singing softly to himself, one of the songs of his native land,

" *Vive la Canadienne,*
Vole, mon coeur, vole,
Vive la Canadienne,
Et ses jolis yeux doux."

" Jean loves the song," remarked his father proudly. " I think he make fine singer, some day."

Hank choked back a last gust of feeling, stepped into the hot, little room, and saluted his French neighbours with great amiability and good humour. " They were only foreigners," he reflected, " but very decent neighbours, very decent."

" I'm elbowed out of my own house, Mrs. Melançon," he said in his thick, good-natured voice. " We've got a stranger in there so big that there doesn't seem to be accommodation for us both in the same room."

" A stranger, yes," said the Frenchwoman softly. " I see her arrive at sundown. You were with her, also the leetle 'Tilda Jane."

She paused here, her native politeness keeping her from asking questions, yet her curiosity shone so strongly from her face that Hank launched himself on a tide of narration, trying meanwhile not to talk and laugh at the same time — one of his besetting sins.

"Seems like only last week," he began, "that I was driving through the woods down Marsden way, and was stopped by a child with a dog done up in a shawl — and yet it was two whole years ago."

Mrs. Melançon nodded her head. "Yes, yes, how often has she tole us of your goodness. You took her in your sleigh. You sent her to take care of your poor fathah — she a leetle chile without a fam'ly. She foun' a home that she loves — that she loves, my children, as you do yours," she remarked emphatically, glancing round at the ring of interested faces, for children and dogs had stopped their play, and the boy with the violin had drawn near, and was staring at the American caller.

"Yes," continued Hank modestly, "I know 'Tilda Jane sets store by her home, — though she had a tough time at first," he added, with an uneasy look at his hosts.

"Let um do," uttered a hollow voice from the corner.

They all gazed in the direction of the old grandfather who had just spoken, and Mrs. Melançon laughed softly. "There speaks the deah grandfathah. He and the grandmothah are listening to you, and he will have no blame on his next doah

frien'. Some do amiable things, some do the bad. We can not change."

"But we can," spoke up her husband excitedly. "Mr. Deelson — he change."

"That is so!" exclaimed Hank, bringing down his fat fist on the table. "My father has changed, and I tell you neighbours, it's owing to that young girl who has been good and patient. She mastered him — but I misdoubt she's got herself into a peck of trouble now — I guess you've all heard her talk, as I have, of getting another orphan to coddle and comfort, and make her forget the frowns of the cold world."

"Yes, yes," said the woman eagerly, "we have. Said she, 'I will send to the 'sylum where I was raised in trouble. I will ask them to send me anothah leetle girl, the most unhappy they have, who, like me, wishes for a good home with a leetle rocking-chair, and someone to love her.'"

"A little rocking-chair!" exclaimed Hank, and, despite his best efforts, he went off into another peal of laughter.

The Frenchwoman threw up her hands with an excited gesture. "Mr. Deelson! that — that grand lady is not the leetle, new orphan!"

Hank bobbed his head violently, and, when he could get his breath, exclaimed, "That 'grand lady' as you call her, by which I suppose you mean

that big lady, that monstrous lady, that heavy-heeled lady, is 'Tilda Jane's orphan, and I tell you she's got a handful."

"But I do not understan'," said Mrs. Melançon in a dismayed tone. "She — your adopted sistah, 'Tilda Jane, wish for a leetle girl, a quite leetle girl."

Hank mopped his hot face with his handkerchief, and moved further from the fire. "Yes, that's right, but at the last, I put my spoke in the wheel. Says I, 'Look here, 'Tilda. When you first come here, I wanted you to go to school, but we couldn't afford it. Now my salary's been raised, and we can get someone to help with the housework, and waiting on father. You've been studying three times a week at night with that good woman Mrs. Tracy, for two years, but that ain't enough, and you're tired when it comes dark.'"

He paused for breath, and the Frenchwoman nodded her head benevolently. "Mrs. Tracy, yes, yes, I know her. A good lady — she takes interes' in all who wish for help."

"Well, as I wanted 'Tilda Jane to do regular school work," Hank continued, "I said, 'When you write for your orphan, don't ask for a baby. Get a sizable one that can help you good.' I didn't tell her to ask for a bean-pole. However, I didn't see her letter to the 'ladyboards,' as she calls the

women who manage the institution. It's half my opinion, that they've put a shrewd trick on her, out of spite for the slip she gave them when she run away."

"The leetle girl suffered much in that 'sylum," said the Frenchwoman with a shudder.

"It wasn't managed right," replied Hank. "All asylums ain't like that. There's a new kind with separate cottages for the children that is fine. Some old bodies with backward notions ran this Marsden one, but Mr. Tracy's got ahead of them."

"The husban' of the good Mrs. Tracy?" inquired Mrs. Melançon.

"The same. He's as good as she is," and, though Hank did not tell the French people, he paused an instant to think inwardly and gratefully of his present good position in the Waysmith lumber mill, due to Mr. Tracy's interest in him.

"Yes, Mr. Tracy got ahead of them," Hank continued, "and in an awful smart way. After 'Tilda Jane told him how unhappy she had been there, he had a quiet investigation made. He's a man that's got a lot of influence, and, when he found our little girl's charges were true, he made up his mind he'd break the thing up. Whether the lady managers suspected him or not, I don't know, but they've had to shut up the right wing of their

asylum, and the left wing, and now, I believe, it's a question of giving up the main body."

"How did he do it?" asked the Frenchman curiously.

"He has an informer near by, and, as soon as he knows of one orphan or a batch of orphans being sent to the asylum, he tries to get someone to adopt them. He writes here, there and everywhere, and farmers and their wives, from every part of the old Pine Tree State, bear down on that asylum, and lug the orphans off to their farms in open places, or to settlements in the woods."

"Perhaps then," said Mrs. Melançon, "the ladies had not so many children to give your leetle sistah a choice."

"That's a point for them," said Hank. "I wouldn't be surprised if the May-pole next door might have been their last hope."

"But you will not let her keep this — this elevated person," asked the Frenchwoman anxiously.

"Not for a horse and buggy," said Hank warmly, "not if 'Tilda Jane don't want her. But what I'm fearing is that she'll think it her duty to keep 'this elevated person,' as you call her, and train her in the way she should go. 'Tilda is a mighty hard person to move when she gets on the duty track."

"She is a good leetle girl," said the woman,

softly. "She is not like mos' othahs. She started sad, and it smoothed out the badness mos' children have."

"Indeed, she *is* good," said Hank vigorously. "She's made a home for me and Father, and I tell you, when a fellow knocks round in country hotels, and boarding-houses as I have, he just warms up to a good fireside and his own chair and plate at the table."

"An' she's clevah, too," murmured Mrs. Melançon.

"Clever!" ejaculated Hank. "She's a Napoleon. It's a pity she hadn't had a good start in the world — good parents, good health and a good education."

"Them that's boun' to get on, gets on," said the Frenchman solemnly.

"Oh, I've no patience with that saying," remarked Hank. "If you're bound to get on, you do; but you'd have done better to have had a helping hand. 'Tilda Jane's a smart girl, but I daresay she'll flatten out as a woman. No young critter ought to have any care, but to put food in its mouth, and to play and learn. Look at the factory young ones. What kind of men and women do they make? All the life's drained out of 'em."

"Hear that, my children," said the Frenchwoman. "Are you not glad that you have a home

and parents who put food and books before you? The poor 'Tilda Jane had worry and sorrow, as a young chile."

"Well, I must go," said Hank, jumping up. "'Tilda Jane will be wondering where I am — Good-night to you all."

"Good-night, sir — good-night," said the French family in unison, and Hank, after making his best bow to the grandparents, swung himself out of the room.

CHAPTER II

A CONFLICT OF WILLS

BEFORE entering his own back door, Hank took the precaution of looking in the window. His father had gone to bed, and the slight, dark 'Tilda Jane stood in the middle of the kitchen, looking up at the tall, clumsy newcomer, who towered above her.

"'Pon my word," muttered Hank, "that big girl is the ugliest woman I ever saw — all except her hair," he added, as he surveyed the abundant, reddish-brown locks combed back in a tidy mass from the plain-featured face. "That hair is fine — good colour, soft as silk, and well-groomed. She ain't slack, if she *is* gawky," and his eye ran approvingly over her clean, cotton dress.

As he lifted the latch of the kitchen door, 'Tilda Jane was just saying patiently, "And so your name is Garraby."

"Yes, *Miss* Garraby," replied the newcomer, with emphasis on the Miss.

"Miss Garraby," repeated 'Tilda Jane, "but what is your first name?"

"It ain't no matter about my fust name," said the girl, doggedly. "A fust name in a grown person is like the knocker on the front door. It ain't often in use, 'cept for weddin's and funerals."

"We ain't — that is, we are not — expecting to have either weddings or funerals," said 'Tilda Jane calmly, "but I'd like to know what to call you."

"Seems to me I tole you my name," said Miss Garraby, stiffly.

"But I can't say 'Miss Garraby' every time I speak to you."

"Why kint you?"

Hank stood silently staring at them. The new girl kept rolling a cunning eye at him, as if wondering whether he were going to interfere or not. 'Tilda Jane, after an affectionate glance at him as he entered the door, did not look at him. She was absorbed in the new girl, and, not being easily beaten, she presently returned to the attack with quiet persistence. "You expect to call me by my first name, don't you?"

"Course I do — you're 'Tilda Jane, leetle 'Tilda Jane."

"You have come here to help me do the work," continued 'Tilda Jane. "I don't expect to call you

servant, because I notice all the girls get mad when you say that."

Miss Garraby bridled haughtily. "Don't you servant me. I be a lady."

"And an orphan," said 'Tilda Jane with a fleeting smile. "Now if we're to work together like sisters, it would be very funny for me to call you 'Miss.'"

"I don't see no fun nowhere," retorted Miss Garraby, gazing about her with a mystified air, "an' I be older than you. If there ain't no fashion to the order of callin' me Miss, we'll start it."

'Tilda Jane, quick to take advantage of an opening, remarked, "You say you are older than I am. How old are you?"

Miss Garraby hesitated an instant, then she said oracularly, "I be what I am, an' only the passon what marries me, an' the feller that gits me, can raise the laugh on me, 'count of my age."

As if by chance, her eye, as she spoke, roved comprehensively over Hank. The fat young man gave a distinct shudder, but he stepped manfully out from the dark background, and set his teeth firmly.

'Tilda Jane frowned, and for a few seconds busied herself in stepping to the near-by table, and lowering the wick of the lamp that had begun to smoke. She had a strange, unchildish dislike for

unbecoming levity, and, when she next spoke, it was with a hard tone in her voice. "Since you won't tell me your age," she said, "I'll call you thirty."

"Thutty!" ejaculated Miss Garraby with a contemptuous snort.

"Twenty-five, then," continued 'Tilda Jane. "That is too much, I see by your face. Twenty-two — oh! you look uneasy. You're twenty — we can stop there."

Miss Garraby gave her a furious stare, then, with the uncomfortable consciousness that, when it came to a question of brains, this slight young girl might get ahead of her, she said gruffly, "I want to go to bed. Gimme a candle."

"Certainly," replied 'Tilda Jane, "when we have settled about the name. I've got to write the lady-boards — I mean the ladies that run things at the asylum — whether we'll keep you."

"Keep me!" exclaimed Miss Garraby. "Is it talk of *keep*. I thought it was talk of *stay!*"

"There's no talk of stay now," remarked 'Tilda Jane coolly, "there's the question of go. If you'll tell me your first name, and if my adopted brother agrees," she said, turning respectfully to Hank, "I guess I'll keep you."

Miss Garraby began to waver. "I laid out to run things myself," she said lingeringly, "when I see how young and small you be. I ain't never

been no mistress nowhere, and I'm hankerin' for power."

"Maybe, some day, you will have a house of your own," said 'Tilda Jane consolingly.

"Who's boss here, anyway?" inquired Miss Garraby.

'Tilda Jane pointed to Hank.

"An' I figgered I'd be," murmured Miss Garraby. "Wal, he's big enough," she said half admiringly, half contemptuously.

"Bosses aren't made," said 'Tilda Jane. "They just come natural. Mr. Hank pays the bills. He has to be boss."

The little girl stifled a tired yawn as she spoke, and Hank, with a glance at the clock, stepped forward. "Look here, young woman, you Garraby, you — you've come here to be company for this young girl. If you like it, stay and take her orders with no sour looks. If you don't like it, get out. There's a train at ten-thirty for Bangor. Now which is it to be — *ang root* for bed, or *ang root* for the station?"

Overcome by his decided manner, and his mysterious attempt at French, Miss Garraby succumbed, but not with meekness. "I be called Perletta Garraby," she said flauntingly, as she took up her candlestick, "an' my age is nineteen. I run away from home when I was six, an' I'll run away from here

if you bosses me. — Gimme some more matches will ye, an' don't call me early, for I be dead sleepy."

After she got her matches, she went lumbering across the kitchen, and up the stairway. When she slammed her bed-room door behind her 'Tilda Jane and Hank, with one accord, smiled at each other, then drew two chairs up to the stove.

CHAPTER III

WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH GRAMPA

"Sissy," said Hank solemnly, "I thought you'd got a handful, but 'pon my word, it's more than that — it's an armful."

"It's more than an armful, Hank," replied the little girl soberly, "it's a heartful."

"And we were so snug," he said lugubriously gazing about the neat kitchen, "just like three bugs in a rug."

'Tilda Jane, being wholly taken up with the compliment to herself, saw no inelegance in the comparison.

"We were," she said, "and will be."

"Why — you don't think you can stop that mule from kicking?"

"There's no fun in kicking if there isn't anything to kick at. She's fresh from the asylum, Hank."

"That's so," he said thoughtfully, and he stared at the expiring fire.

"Seems to me, most orphans had kind of tired-out parents," said the little girl, wistfully. "Parents that didn't stand by their children."

"Some parents can't," said Hank mildly. "They have poor health, or die."

"But those that live for a while," said 'Tilda Jane, wearily — "Our new orphan's parents used to beat her before they died. She was telling me before you come — I mean, you came — in. She ran away to the woods to the Indians."

After giving this information, 'Tilda Jane fell into a long and painful brown study, and Hank, by way of arousing her, said, at last, "How long do you think parents ought to stand by their children — I mean how long should they keep them at home before they let them go out into the cold world?"

"Oh, I don't know — I don't know," said 'Tilda Jane with sudden fire, "but as long as they can. It's so hard to grow up, Hank, so hard. Children should have their time."

"There's some folks in this very town," said Hank, "agitating for more laws against child labour — that is, children working for pay. They say worn-out children ain't any good to the State, while healthy boys and girls make citizens that bring in money — they're remunerative, in fact."

"I don't know about that," said 'Tilda Jane with

a look on her face as if she were striving to understand him, and could not, "but I know that God made children. He tells them to play. They ought to have their time for it. Trouble comes soon enough."

"You're right, sissy, you're right, and now don't you think you'd better pass on this trouble to some one else?"

"You mean Perletta?"

"I mean Miss Garraby."

'Tilda Jane smiled. "I'll do as you say, Hank," she remarked, humbly.

"But would it worry you if I marched her back to the asylum? It's just as you say."

"I often lay — no, lie — awake a spell nights, turning over things in my mind," said 'Tilda Jane, thoughtfully. "I guess I'd be just as wakeful if she went, 'cause she wants to stay. Don't you know, Hank, you like to see your trouble — not to worry about it being away off in the dark where you can't get at it?"

"You're dreadful disappointed in her, though," he said, sharply.

"Well," said the little girl impartially, "I'll not say no, if you ask me if I am, but it isn't because she hasn't the blue eyes and curly hair I've always hankered for — being one that folks never turn to look after in the street —"

"Hush up, 'Tilda, you're good, and that's better than being blue-eyed and curly-haired."

"I'm not good, Hank," she said, turning two tearful, dark eyes on him. "I have awful ugly feelings sometimes. I just blush at myself."

"You're good enough for me," he said doggedly.

"We were trying to ravel out things about Perletta," she said shortly, "and I was going to say that it's her inward contrariness that will bother me; but unless you say the word 'Stop!' I guess I'll make up my mind to have and to hold her. There's good in her, brother."

"All right," he said rising and stretching himself, "and now, as the fire has just gone to sleep, I guess I'll follow its example. I'm tired, for we had a lively day at the mill. Mr. Waysmith wanted some old accounts."

"You're getting on well, aren't you, Hank?" the little girl inquired anxiously. "No trouble, and you like your work?"

"You bet I do. Being only assistant, the old book-keeper takes most of the responsibility, and I'm glad, for Mr. Waysmith is a hard man."

The little girl shuddered. "How is he hard, Hank — is he cross for faults?"

"He just jumps on us, sissy, when anything goes wrong. I'd rather get under the big saw, than face him."

'Tilda Jane became pale, and, drawing in her breath, she murmured, "Lord help me, when I have to march up to him."

"Father went to bed some time ago, didn't he?" asked Hank, suppressing a huge yawn.

'Tilda Jane, with a start, called back her wandering thoughts. "Yes, he went at half past seven. — Hank," she added, hesitatingly, and her two dark eyes were eager and piercing as she stared at him, "was your father all his life kind of brooding and droopy-like, with spasms by turns as he is now?"

"Oh, no," said Hank, lightly, "'tis only since he quit work. Old folks are like that. They're thinking over past days."

"But it seems to me he isn't natural," persisted 'Tilda Jane.

"How, not natural?" inquired Hank good-naturedly, but with a careless accent. "You are such a one to stew over trifles, 'Tilda."

"Well," said the little girl thoughtfully, "when I come — no, when I came — here, he was just like a dear old gun that was always going off when you didn't expect it to. There were neither times nor seasons with him. I don't call that natural, and when he lost that money before you come home, I laid it to that. But he forgot the sixty dollars he never found, and now he is just like he was at

first — that is, about fretting — he isn't so ugly to folks."

"Oh! that's just elderly cussedness," said Hank, lazily.

"Yes, but what makes it — old folks are apt to boil over, but he used to be boiled over all the time, and now he tries to hide it, but I know he's simmering to himself."

Hank shook his head. "You've got me up a tree, sissy. Wait till I'm most eighty, and I'll tell you."

The little girl held her breath, and looked at him strangely. "Seems as if he must have some load on his mind," she said at last, in a low voice.

Hank was shrewd enough to catch her meaning. "Now what could my old dad have on his mind?" he asked irritably. "You're the most aggravating young one, 'Tilda. If you ain't got any trouble, you go sniffing round and make some. Father's main improved, now. He don't fling his crutches at your dogs any more, and he don't yell at you so often. I say he's a changed character. Now, why can't you rest on that?"

"He don't sleep well," said 'Tilda Jane, wearily.

"No old folks do. They don't exercise. How can they sleep?"

"He calls out in his sleep," said the little girl, doggedly.

Hank stepped forward, and stood threateningly over her. "Now look here, young one — you sleep with your door shut at night after this. Do you hear?"

"Yes," she said, meekly.

"All day long you're bearing on your pinched shoulders the troubles of this household, and soon you'll have the troubles of the whole town of Ciscasset. You've got to stop it. If you worry all night, as well as all day, you'll soon be as lean as a greyhound. My father is all right. He's got the dinner bell. If he wants anything in the night, and rings it, I'll hear. Now will you mind me?"

"Yes, Hank," she said quietly. "Don't you want a piece of pumpkin pie before you go to bed?"

"I guess I do, sissy. Is it in the pantry?"

"No, I put it in the oven to take the chill off," and she went to the stove. "And there's a cup of milk covered up on the shelf over there for you. Good night, I guess I'll go upstairs."

"Ain't you going to look after your dogs?" asked Hank, curiously.

'Tilda Jane turned back with a start.

"You must have something pretty brain-scattering going on inside you, or you'd never forget your animals," remarked Hank a little uneasily, and, neglecting his pie, he turned a critical eye on his adopted sister.

'Tilda Jane, aware of his disapproving watchfulness, laughed a little affectedly, and said, "Never mind me, brother Hank. I feel kind of dreamy to-night."

"It's that girl," he said, with a curl of his lip.

"No it ain't — I mean it isn't."

"What is it, then?"

'Tilda Jane did not reply at first. Finally she said curtly, "I hate to lie when it isn't necessary. Seems to me this is one of the times."

Hank slowly ate his pie, but his eyes never left her as she opened the door of the substantial woodhouse that he had had built on to the house since he came home, and brought in a small box of straw. Reaching under the stove, she drew out a small, semi-blind, three-legged, crooked-tailed dog, and put him in the box. Then, carefully folding up an old blanket, she put it on the floor, beside the box, for a large hunting dog who came and gratefully curled himself up on it.

"Now don't you think there's something the matter with those dogs?" asked the young man, ironically. "Seems to me Poacher has a kind of faraway look in his eyes. Maybe he's hankering after the deer in the woods up north."

"Stop teasing, Hank," said 'Tilda Jane pleadingly, yet she smiled as she bent over the hound, and lifted his velvet muzzle in her hand.

"What became of the man that owned him?" asked Hank suddenly, as his thoughts took a new direction.

"Mr. Lucas?" said 'Tilda Jane. "Oh! he's all right. He's trying to keep out of the woods in winter so Satan won't tell him to go and poach again. I write him at times, to let him know that Poacher isn't going to be a backslider, either. He says his boys are doing fine. He makes them go to school, but he has promised to let them go in the sawmill where he works next year."

"Suppose that other dog of yours, there," said Hank, waving his pie crust in the direction of the little box drawn close to the stove, "that rickety Gippie died, what would you do?"

"I'd cry my eyes out for a while, then I'd get another," said 'Tilda Jane slowly.

"Another orphan," remarked Hank, meditatively.

"Yes," she replied, warmly. "I like the poor dogs, and the sick dogs. There are plenty to care for the well-favoured ones."

"How old is Gippie?"

"Nobody knows," said 'Tilda Jane, solemnly. "His muzzle has been white ever since I had him."

"He don't seem to be sleeping well," pursued Hank, slyly, as Gippie stirred in his sleep, and gave

a queer little yelp. "Do you suppose that there is something on his mind?"

'Tilda Jane was prematurely old and careworn, yet she was still a child in some ways, and, tenderly shaking the little old dog, she burst into sudden laughter. "Wake up, Gippie. There's friends all round you. There ain't no — I mean there isn't any — big dog chasing you."

"Maybe he thought his chaser was a cat," remarked Hank.

"Gippie never quailed before a cat," said 'Tilda Jane decidedly. "Haven't you seen him run at them tail first, then turn round and give a bite."

"Yes, and I've seen him gallop after a mouse so hotly," said Hank, "that, when it got on his blindest side, he'd go most crazy, and then in his excitement he'd eat it, and forget he'd eaten it, and go on looking for it."

'Tilda Jane was shaking with laughter. "I've seen him do that," she said, "lots of times, and it's queer, for he doesn't favour mice for eating."

"We do lots of thing when we're worked up, that we wouldn't do sober," remarked Hank sententiously.

Poacher, who had sprung off his blanket to the aid of the dreaming cur, now called the little girl's attention to himself by affectionately pressing his head against her arm.

"My beauties!" she said caressingly, and her glance embraced the two dogs. "What would I do without you?"

"You take solid comfort with those beasts, don't you?" said Hank.

"But you like dogs, too!" she said anxiously.

"Oh, yes, I like them, but not as you do. They're only dumb critters to me. Now a horse—"

'Tilda Jane sprang up. "Oh! Hank, I forgot to ask you. Did you get a letter from that man to-day?"

"Yes," said Hank gloomily, "and he won't let me have my mare back for less than two hundred and fifty dollars."

"Oh, brother! but you'll raise it?"

"I've only got one hundred and fifty."

"Could you get a hundred anywhere?"

"I could save it out of my salary, but it would take too long. He'll sell the mare."

The little girl gave a distressed cry. "We must have her — we must have her — your pretty Milkweed." Then, hurrying to a cupboard, she drew out an old sugar bowl. Lifting the cover, she said, "Count my berry money, Hank, count it."

The young man, in a bewildered way, drew out some bills from the sugar bowl. "You didn't get all this from selling berries, sissy?"

"Part of it, Hank. Currants were all the fash-

ion this year, and we had lots of them. Then when you were on your holidays, I saved some from the housekeeping."

"There's twenty-five dollars here," said Hank with a kind of solemn joy.

"And grampa has fifty dollars," said 'Tilda Jane. "He's saved it for you from his pension. Just as soon as he heard about your wanting your horse back, he began to scrimp."

"Father did!" exclaimed Hank, and a sudden glow illuminated his face. "'Twas you, young monkey, that put it in his head."

"Suppose I did," she said stoutly, "there was reason in it."

"God bless you," said the young man warmly. "You've been the light of this house ever since you came into it. If I get that mare, you'll never get out of the sleigh or buggy, except for meals."

At this picture of her busy self driving behind Hank's beautiful white-streaked mare, with only pauses for refreshment, 'Tilda Jane again burst into such happy, whole-hearted laughter that she almost suffocated.

"Oh! go 'way, Hank," she exclaimed, waving one lean brown hand at him, "you are so drollish, you most choke me."

Hank was not a handsome young man. He was stout and decidedly commonplace, but, in the eyes

of his adopted sister, he was almost perfect, and, with a pleased smile irradiating his plain features, and whistling softly, in order not to disturb his father, he tramped off to bed.

Left alone, 'Tilda Jane tucked her dogs in bed, and, with a last caress, left them to slumber till morning.

"The dogs are all right, I'm all right," she murmured, as she crept out of the room, "Hank is all right — That orphan — tush! she isn't going to fret me much; but poor old grampa — poor old grampa. I'm young and little, but I must go to see Mr. Waysmith. There is no one else, for I see I'll get no help from Hank. Mr. Tracy could go, but I can't run blurting poor grampa's sorrows all over the place."

CHAPTER IV

THE ARRIVAL OF MILKWEED

'Tilda Jane stood watching her huge orphan, who was out in the wood-house, splitting kindling wood.

The orphan was having considerable trouble with Poacher and the half blind Gippie, who were circling about her, getting persistently in the way of the hatchet with which she was giving powerful strokes to the sticks of wood.

"She favours dogs, and she's good to grampa," murmured 'Tilda Jane. "That's about a hundredweight off my mind." Then she said aloud, "Perletta!"

"Hey!" exclaimed the big girl, turning round.

"You needn't chop up those boxes. Mr. Hank said he would split the kindling. It's not fit work for women, he says."

"Go 'long," remarked Perletta. "I'm wuth more than him any day. Hank's as fat as a settled minister, but he ain't brawny."

"You'd better not let him hear you call him Hank," said the little girl. "He'd be angry."

"He'll not git mad about nothin'," said Perletta, cunningly, "not now. He's too set up about that mare comin' — an' how can he split wood when he's out in the barn all the time, a-fixing up that box stall?"

'Tilda Jane beamed all over. She was almost as pleased as Hank was with their new acquisition.

"How does it be about that mare?" inquired Perletta, curiously. "Seems like as you had her afore."

"I never had her. Mr. Hank owned her when he was in the creamery business. Then he had to sell her, and go into the mill."

"An' what is it he names her?" pursued Perletta. "Milkweed — what's that for a name?"

"She's got little tricksey splashes of white all over her," said 'Tilda Jane, "and I believe she was named Milkweed partly owing to that, and partly owing to the milk trade he was in — Hark! don't I hear sleigh bells now? He was to come with her this afternoon, when his work at the mill was over," and, snatching an old shawl from a hook, she wrapped it round her, and ran like a deer through the wood-house door to the snowy yard.

Hank was proudly driving in the gate. He sat in a smart, shiny cutter, with a warm fur rug over

his knees, and in front of him trotted a dainty, high-stepping, bay mare, flecked with white, as if she had dashed foam from her lips over her chest and sides.

'Tilda Jane gave a glad cry, and, running up, threw her arms round the neck of the gratified animal.

Perletta, after one long look, lounged into the wood-house, got two rosy-cheeked apples, and, putting them in her palm, went out again and offered them to the new member of the family.

Hank had sprung out, and was beginning to unharness. His face was aglow with satisfaction, and he listened contentedly to 'Tilda Jane's purring remarks near the ear of the graceful Milkweed.

Perletta silently fed the apples, then, as the mare tossed her head, and whinnied pleadingly, she laughed, and went into the house for more.

When at last Milkweed was unharnessed, Hank said to her, "Step into the barn, beauty, and see your new home."

Milkweed followed him like a dog, and behind her was a small procession consisting of 'Tilda Jane, Perletta, the two dogs, and some tame pigeons who came waddling in with their eyes fixed on the corn barrel.

The Jersey cow turned her head as they entered

the barn, and threw a benevolent glance at the mare who was to be her companion more than any other creature's, for they occupied neighbouring stalls.

The hens in the poultry house next door, hearing an unusual commotion, lifted up their voices in joyful anticipation of their evening meal.

"I guess I'll git somethin' for their crops," remarked Perletta in her uncouth yet kind fashion, and she went lumbering toward the house to prepare their warm corn meal supper.

"What a joyful family we are!" exclaimed 'Tilda Jane gleefully. "You and me, and Perletta, and the dogs, and the cow, and Milkweed, and the pigeons, — and the poor little sparrows," she added in conclusion. "Here, little beggars, let me give you something to stay you before the cold night comes."

As she spoke, she dipped a quart measure deep in the corn barrel, and threw the cracked kernels out in the yard. The pigeons got the larger pieces, the sparrows the smaller ones, and all ate in peace and harmony.

"Folks tell me sparrows are bad," said 'Tilda Jane, "and so they are, for I saw them driving away the wild birds from the Melançons' garden, but ours don't fight the wild birds, for we've had their nests all summer."

"You stuff them," said Hank, kindly. "They don't need to fight when there's enough for all."

"And we don't have as many grubs on our trees as our neighbours do," continued 'Tilda Jane. "I see the sparrows eating them."

"Sparrows eat some kinds of worms," said Hank. "I've heard they were imported to destroy the looping caterpillars which used to devour the American lindens. But they would not eat the hairy caterpillars, and our native birds would. I'm afraid your friend the sparrow is a pretty big nuisance, 'Tilda. The question is how to get rid of him. He's here to stay I guess — I say, sissy, I'm powerful glad to get this mare back."

"I know you are, Hank," she said, as she restored the dipper to the barrel. "I just can figure to myself how you feel. Suppose some one had had Gippie away from me a whole year?"

Hank burst out laughing, and threw a comical glance at the little dog who was stretching out his head, sniffing violently, and trying to make his nose do duty for his other senses.

"I ain't had one minute's peace since I had to give her up," said Hank, pausing in his operation of giving Milkweed a good rub-down, and turning his red face toward 'Tilda Jane, who stood peering at him from the folds of the shawl enwrapping her head and shoulders. "Every hour of the day I

had her before me — was she over-driven and whipped when she was tired? Did that fellow scream at her, and make her stand round? — she, my beauty, that never had a cross word."

"It's cruel hard to have to give up an animal," said 'Tilda Jane with a shudder. "It takes me back to my asylum days when I ran away to save Gippie from being taken from me," and, picking up the little animal, she cuddled him in her shawl.

"I asked that fellow if he found Milkweed smart and bright," said Hank, indignantly, "and what do you think he said, — Why, not a bit ahead of other horses — she, the quickest horse wit in the old pine-tree state. What do you think she did just now when I was coming down Wisconnet Hill?"

"I don't know, Hank," said 'Tilda Jane softly.

"Why, she stopped short, and turned to one side. The bit had parted in her mouth, and the lines were slipping through my hands. Any other horse would have run. I never had such an accident before, but she stood just like a lamb."

"What did you do, Hank?"

"I jumped out pretty lively, ran to her head, and led her to the harness store — Then, do you mind, sissy, the time she got loose in that hotel barn at the old Moss Glen Inn?"

"Yes, I mind," said 'Tilda Jane, and at the men-

tion of the Inn, a shadow passed over her face. "But tell me again, Hank."

"It was mighty shrewd in her," said Hank, stopping his work, and wiping the perspiration from his face. "I was sick that night, and had to hurry into the Inn. I forgot to warn Mrs. Minley's man that Milkweed would untie every knot except one particular kind. Of course, her teeth was soon busy with his knot, and in the morning he found her loose in a corner of the barn, where Mrs. Minley, who was as untidy in her barn as she was tidy in her house, had stored a lot of barbed wire, some old ploughs, some poultry netting, and a few farm tools thrown in promiscuous. There stood Milkweed, feet fast, and before her an open door, and, before the open door, a field of oats. Now any other horse would have plunged, but she stood like a rock, waiting for me to come. The man yelled for me, and it took the two of us to get her out, and I had to cut some of the barbed wire with shears."

"The dear horsie," murmured 'Tilda Jane; then she said bitterly, "When Mrs. Minley tried to send me back to the asylum, as I was running away from it, she played a scampish trick on a poor orphan."

"I must tell you what I heard about her the other day," said Hank with a chuckle. "Shows

how your sin does chase you, and catch up with you in this world. We both know Mrs. Minley had no kind feelings in trying to send you back to the asylum. She wanted to stand in with that Mrs. Grannis who had a mortgage on her house. When she came spanking up to the Inn with Mrs. Grannis, and found you'd run away again, the lady she was so dead set on pleasing turned on her and said, 'You've fooled me.' Then she got nasty about the mortgage, and Mrs. Minley had to sell out. She's cook somewhere in Bangor now."

"Why, Hank!" ejaculated 'Tilda Jane, "you surprise me, and what became of Mrs. Minley's good sister — the one who gave me a helping hand in running away?"

"She married the hired man, and lives on a place his father left him near the Moss Glen station."

"Where I passed that woful night in the woods," said 'Tilda Jane, hugging Gippie a little closer. "Oh, Hank! what performances I've had."

"Yes, you have had considerable for a young one," replied Hank thoughtfully. "I guess you took out a kind of accident policy — Stand over, Milkweed."

"Well, I'm taking solid comfort in knowing Ruth Ann married," said 'Tilda Jane heartily. "I knew she'd like to, 'cause she said in a kind of

piny way that she'd never had no — I mean any — offer."

"She warn't what you call a raring tearing beauty," said Hank dispassionately.

'Tilda Jane looked distressed. "Don't make fun of her, Hank. I don't want to laugh at her. She was good to me."

"All the same, she looked like a graven image with a wispy hank of hair curled tight at the back of it — Well, I guess she was a good cook. If I couldn't get a beauty and a cook in one, I'd take the cook, if she was as homely as a gridiron."

"That reminds me," said 'Tilda Jane, "we are going to have hot cakes to-night. I must go and show Perletta how to make them."

"'Tilda," called Hank as she was running away, after a last caress of Milkweed. "I left that harness outside, thinking I'd take it in the house and clean it. It will make a mess in your ship-shape kitchen, but you'll not fuss, I guess."

"Fuss, no — you can't do it out here, or in the wood-house — you'd freeze. But must you do it to-night?"

"I could wait till to-morrow."

"I want to run out a few minutes this evening, right after supper," said 'Tilda Jane, "and I'd like to help you, so if you wait till to-morrow —"

"I'll do it to-night," said Hank promptly, "handling harness ain't fit work for your small-sized hands. Now if that elephant there wants to help me," and he nodded in the direction of the house and Perletta.

"She'd jump at it," said 'Tilda Jane gaily, "and it's hard to get her work for the evening. If she's idle, she's sassy — I mean saucy."

"I'm glad she don't want to trot the streets," said Hank, "if she did we'd have to get a block and tackle to fetch her home — Now run along in, sissy, your teeth are chattering."

'Tilda Jane and the dogs scampered to the house, and soon the little girl's face was as red as fire, as she bent over the kitchen stove.

It seemed as if Hank could not leave his newly obtained treasure that night. He kept altering the straps of the gay, striped rug he had bought for her, he fussed with the fodder, and only when the supper bell rang long and lustily for the second time could he tear himself away from her, with an affectionate caress of her beautiful head.

Her eloquent eyes followed him, he knew, as he went to the stable door, though the whole barn had become dusky in the gathering twilight.

"My land!" he ejaculated warmly, "there's nothing but solid satisfaction to be got out of the friendship of a horse. That critter is as content

to be back as I am to have her. I know by the way she mumbled my sleeve and my shoulder — What a tasty smell!" and his nostrils dilated delightedly as he entered the house.

CHAPTER V

'TILDA JANE'S MYSTERIOUS ERRAND

BEFORE Hank gave up travelling to settle down in Ciscasset, 'Tilda Jane and grampa used to take their meals in the kitchen. It was convenient and made less work for the little girl.

When Hank came home, and obtained work in Mr. Waysmith's mill, he said, "No more eating in the kitchen. We've got a small dining-room, and what is it for, if not for use? I'll fix it up," and night after night, when his work at the mill was done, he painted, papered, and re-furnished, until he made the dining-room the pleasantest room in the house.

It had one bay window looking toward the east, and in this window he had put up shelves for 'Tilda Jane's house plants. To-night, however, the night of Milkweed's arrival home, the plants were carefully covered with newspapers to keep out the frost, the red curtains were drawn, and a brisk fire burned in a tiny stove.

'Tilda Jane, whose notions of art were yet somewhat primitive, had bought a number of pictures to hang about the walls. There was a highly coloured chromo of a hunting-dog to suit her own fancy, a winter landscape for grampa, a lurid representation of a horse for Hank, and, for general purposes, and for the good and enjoyment of the whole family, a bright and staring motto worked in wool — "God Bless Our Home."

Her eyes often rested on this petition. The lonely girl who had so long prayed for the blessings of a home, never forgot to be grateful that she had at last attained to one. Whatever her trials and tribulations were, underneath ran the deep current of satisfaction that she had obtained the desire of her heart.

In honour of Milkweed's arrival there was an extra supper prepared, and Hank's lips curled appreciatively as he washed and brushed in the woodhouse.

"If that 'Tilda Jane ain't great!" he muttered, as he buried his face in the clean roller towel — "the neatest little housekeeper, and she only a young one. She'll never want for anything as long as I've got a crust. There'll always be two bites to it. — Now, are we all here?" he asked, cheerfully stamping into the kitchen, and surveying the dogs who were under the stove licking their lips,

and 'Tilda Jane and Perletta who were bending over it. "Where's my old dad?"

"Here," said a voice, and grampa came hobbling from his room, supported by his two crutches.

"Let me clear the way, sir," and Hank moved some chairs, and made a path for the old man to enter the dining-room.

"Hey! father — we've got a tip-top spread tonight," exclaimed Hank, as he helped the old man establish himself in his big armchair. "Cold chicken, and potato salad, and hot biscuits and plum preserve, and fruit cake, and if my sense of smell don't deceive me, hot cakes and coffee to come. Now, ain't this better than old widowering it alone?"

Grampa, casting a backward thought at his lonely life before 'Tilda Jane came to live with him, muttered, "Yes, yes — I guess so — yes, yes."

"It's a blessing your appetite holds out," Hank went on affectionately, "it just warms the cockles of my heart to see you eat, and you sleep pretty good and hard, don't you?"

"Yes, yes," said the old man, suspiciously, "of course I sleep. What do I go to bed for?"

"Never have dreams," said Hank good-naturedly, "nor nightmare?"

"Nightmare!" muttered his father indignantly,

"don't know that kind of a mare — never did — never want to."

"Do you hear that, 'Tilda?" said Hank as the little girl entered the room holding a big coffee pot with both hands. "Grampa says he sleeps like a top — never has nightmare."

'Tilda Jane, as she put the pot on the table, turned her flushed face toward Hank with such an unhappy stare that the young man made haste to change the subject.

"I say!" he ejaculated hastily, taking up the cream jug. "Just look at that — thick and yellow as gold. Lots of rich folks in cities can't get such cream for love nor money. That is a jewel of a cow — by the way, 'Tilda, you ain't named her yet. I asked you to get something to call her by. She's such a lady that I feel it ain't right to address her as if she was common cow flesh."

"A name," said 'Tilda Jane, absently. "Oh! call her after the person we were speaking about a spell ago — Ruth Ann, I just loved that woman."

"All right, Ruth Ann let it be, Ruth Ann Minley?"

"No, no," said the little girl with a shudder. "I forgive Mrs. Minley, but I don't want to name any cows after her. Besides, Minley wasn't Ruth Ann's name. I don't know what it was."

"Well, we'll let it go at Dillson," said Hank

jovially, "Ruth Ann Dillson. Give me a good strong cup of coffee, and I'll drink to her health."

The little girl had seated herself behind the coffee-pot and the cups and saucers at the head of the table. Hank took the foot, and old Mr. Dillson sat between them on the side away from the fire.

Just as they were about to bow their heads for 'Tilda Jane's grace before meat, Perletta appeared in the doorway, a knife and fork and a plate in her hand.

'Tilda Jane and grampa scarcely glanced at her, for they had this performance three times a day. Hank was the one to attend to her, and hearing the rattle of the plate, he turned his head and looked over his shoulder at her.

"There's our houri at the gate of paradise again," he said ironically, "only no houri ever was one tenth as sassy. You've put the things on the table. What are you doing there?"

"I'm just as good as you be," she said, doggedly, "I'm going to set down with you."

"Oh! no, you're not. Get back to the kitchen."

She began her usual protest. "In places where I lived afore they allays had me at the table."

"I hope they enjoyed your company," said Hank relentlessly. "You must have been among the 'ristocracy. We common folks don't appreciate you — Get out now."

"When you stays out, I sits there," she said angrily, pointing to the warm side of the table.

"That's like you, to take advantage of my absence. Now go — I'm boss here, and a girl that talks as rude as you do ain't fit to sit down with decent conversing people. You turn over a new leaf and let it stay, and I'll admit you. I ain't proud, but I can't stand sass. Go now, eat your supper by the kitchen fire, and if you're a good girl, I'll let you help me clean the harness this evening."

"I'll not clean no harness," she muttered, as she shambled away; but they all knew that she would be delighted to do so.

"That girl is the most powerful argufier I ever saw," remarked Hank in a disgusted voice. "I don't see how you stand her all day, 'Tilda."

"There's lots of good in her," said the little girl in a low voice, "and I guess she'll get less obstreperous."

"She will, if I have her long enough," said Hank, grimly. "I ain't one to take impudence with a laughing face. Sass has its place in life, but you don't want it clear — I say, that chicken's tender, sissy. Is it one of ours?"

'Tilda Jane wrinkled her face. "No, Hank, I got it in the market. I know it was like being rash with your money, but I just can't eat our chickens,

and you won't kill them, nor Perletta, so what can I do?"

"You're all right, sissy, buy all the chickens you want, but what will you do with ours? Hens are powerful birds at the multiplication table."

"I don't know, Hank. Perhaps I can exchange them. Why is it that we let the hens have pretty, little chickens, and nurse and tend them, and then, just when they're grown up, and company for us, we turn round and kill them?"

Hank shook his head. "There's a good many mysteries in the world, sissy. That blood and thunder one is the worst. We've got to kill, to get on. If we didn't, there'd be a worse state of things than there is now. Did you ever think how many chickens there'd be, if we never killed any?"

"No, Hank."

"After supper I'll get a pencil and do a bit of calculating. If every old hen in Ciscasset kept her chickens, I'll wager that in ten years there wouldn't be enough food in the place for her and us too. We humans would have to go to the wall. That's the way we keep on top. We crowd everything and everybody."

"Oh! not everybody, Hank."

"Yes, everybody. Isn't Jake Wendell too mad to speak to me, 'cause I pushed him out of getting that place in the mill? Mr. Tracy was intending

to offer it to him when you plumped in and begged it for me."

'Tilda Jane paused with a tempting piece of buttered biscuit half way to her mouth. "And am I to blame because Jake Wendell's family is suffering for comforts this winter?"

"No, no, sissy," he said soothingly. "You're not to blame. You'd rather he'd suffer than me."

"I'd rather no one would suffer," she said. "Can't you get him something to do, Hank?"

"Maybe I can," he said, comfortably, "but let him rouse round and get something for himself. It's the smart ones that get on."

'Tilda Jane looked round the room, so comfortable in the glowing firelight and lamp light. "And if I wasn't here, Hank, there'd be some other girl here? I'm crowding someone out."

"That's it, 'Tilda," he said good humouredly. "I hope you'll lie right down and die now."

Her glance travelled round the room once more, then came back to his shining face. "Well I just shan't," she said, with one of her rare flashes of humour. "I'm going to stay with you and grampa."

Hank burst into a roar of laughter, and beat his hand on his knee. "That's right, 'Tilda. Do all the good you can to others, but hold on to your own job."

"If it's right," she said soberly. "I know I'm right to bide here. If I thought I was wrong, Hank, an iron cage wouldn't hold me."

"You bet it wouldn't," he said, "you're the kind of young one to run away with your cage on your back — Hey, grampa?"

"Hello!" said the old man, in a gruff voice, "hello!"

"He's gone deef," said Hank resignedly, "doesn't want to talk. He was all right a spell ago. *Masticatum,* dad," he vociferated, "*ruminescat* in gravy."

"What's that, Hank?" inquired 'Tilda Jane, pricking up her ears.

"Latin, sissy," said the young man roguishly, "you know I'm studying some evenings."

"I'd like to know languages," said the little girl wistfully. "I can say some French I took from the Melançons."

"Let Perletta do more work. I want you to study a lot, and that reminds me — when will you begin going to school?"

"Next Tuesday, Hank. Monday will be wash day."

"Bah! let Silvertongue, there, do the washing. You favour her too much, 'Tilda."

"I won't after this, she was new at first, and things looked queer to her."

"Well, I've had a good supper," said Hank, getting up after a time, "and I'm much obliged to you, sissy, for taking such a lot of pains to make this a special occasion. I guess I'll go out and tell Milkweed about it. Where's the lantern?"

"In the wood-house, Hank, near the churn," and the little girl went to one of the kitchen windows, to watch him going out, swinging the bright light, and sending exquisite rays over the banks of snow.

Suddenly, she roused herself with a start, and went back to the dining-room. "I must be going. I have work to do this evening — Grampa, where do you want to sit? Here, or in the kitchen?"

Grampa, who had mysteriously acquired his hearing, said decidedly, "Here."

'Tilda Jane smiled, as she turned his arm-chair to the fire. Grampa did not say much, but he did not like the new girl any better than Hank did.

"Perletta," said 'Tilda Jane going into the kitchen, "I have to run out a spell this evening."

"Run out," said the big girl in surprise. "Where you going?"

"Never mind — if I wished you to know I would tell you. While I'm gone, I want you to clear the table, and wash the dishes."

"All alone," exclaimed Perletta in dismay.

"Yes, all alone, and be quick about it, so you can help Mr. Hank when he comes in."

"Ain't you goin' out to the hen-house with me, to grease them hens' legs?"

"Not to-night. Not till to-morrow."

"They're plumb scaly."

"They will keep," said 'Tilda Jane with dignity, and she hurried away, while Perletta began to saunter lazily from dining-room to kitchen, muttering under her breath, "Yes, hens' legs can wait — no matter about hens — girls must run the streets — poor hens — Perletta will take the lantern and go all alone to grease their legs — cock-a-doodle-doo!" and she gave a whoop that made poor grampa jump in his chair.

CHAPTER VI

A CALL ON THE LUMBER MERCHANT

THE day's work was over for Mr. Waysmith — the stout, prosperous looking lumber merchant, and the richest man in Ciscasset. His evening was just beginning, and he sat alone in his luxurious library, where none of the family ever penetrated unless at his request. He had spent his usual number of hours at his desk in the office at the mill, he had had his daily drive and his dinner, and now came his time of relaxation.

Many of the latest magazines were on the table by his side. He was stretched out in an easy-chair with his feet to a cozy fire, and sounds of music came from the distant parlour where his wife and children with a number of their friends were amusing themselves.

Last, but not least, over in the corner lay his inseparable friend, companion and guardian — the creature who lived only for him, but in such an unobtrusive way that many persons never suspected his existence.

"Come here, Muffles," he said suddenly, and he held out a hand.

A thoroughbred bulldog, whole-coloured, and with a black mask of a face came composedly from a shadowy corner. He did not lick the hand extended to him, he merely touched it with his black muzzle, and was about to return to his corner, when his master said, "Up here."

The task of springing to the easy-chair was a light one to a dog of such a powerful front. He scarcely seemed to move as he sprang, then he spread his stout and muscular limbs across Mr. Waysmith's knees, and lifted his massive head to his face.

"Courage, tenacity, unyielding stubbornness," murmured Mr. Waysmith, "but, in spite of that enormous head, no more brains than other dogs. You're something like me, Muffles. I am not brilliant. I get on because I hold fast."

The dog never moved a muscle. For that reason he was Mr. Waysmith's chosen confidant. "You listen, and make no sign," continued the merchant, "yet you never sleep where I am concerned. Twice you have saved my life. Muffles, don't die. I could not replace you."

The dog did not wag his tail, nor did he lick the caressing fingers, and finally, as if thinking, "There

is nothing new or remarkable in these observations," he turned his stolid gaze to the fire.

Presently he roused himself and looked toward the door. "Someone is coming," said Mr. Waysmith composedly, "though I hear nothing — Get into your corner."

The dog obeyed him, stealing like a substantial shadow behind a sofa.

An instant later someone knocked at the door, and, when Mr. Waysmith said, "Come in," a bright-faced, young Irish maid announced, with assumed boldness, that a young girl wished to see him.

He frowned slightly. "Send her away. Tell her my office is the place where I see strangers."

"Sure an' I did, sir; but, instid of gittin' out, she's all for gittin' in, an' the housekeeper is afeard she'll not take advice, that she'll take a cold instid, or she'll be for climbin' up the stoop an' insinooatin' herself through a winder, she's that wild to git in."

Mr. Waysmith had a great regard for his old housekeeper's opinion. He had also a slight suspicion that this young girl did not look upon him with proper respect; therefore, with a desire to suppress her, and to get rid of messages from his audacious caller, he said curtly, "Bring her in."

His suspicion with regard to Irish Mary was

quite unfounded. She stood in awe of him quite as much as the rest of his world, and her flow of information had been prompted by nervousness. Therefore, with a relieved, gasping, "Yes, sir," she closed the door, and disappeared.

Mr. Waysmith did not recognize the dark, respectable-looking, half-grown girl who quietly entered, and, drawing himself up in his chair, he fixed her with a solemn, steady stare.

'Tilda Jane was not as nervous as Irish Mary, but still she had considerable dread of this ponderous, dignified man. She had forced herself into his presence, and she supposed he would be very angry with her.

Very much to her relief, he was indulging only in cold disdain. "The high-up folks know how to get mad proper," she murmured. "That yelling and firing things, like poor grampa, upsets me awful — 'Scuse me, sir," she continued aloud, and leaning against a corner of the table, as he did not ask her to sit down, "I've got something to say to you that'll make you prick up your ears just like a dog's — something about business."

This word changed the character of the forced interview. Mr. Waysmith was at all times the alert man of affairs. This girl might have something important to communicate to him. Some disaster might threaten him. Perhaps some evil

disposed person was about to fire his lumber yards. He had been warned of this before.

"Sit down," he said with cold politeness, pointing to a near-by chair.

"I say business," remarked 'Tilda Jane as she obeyed him. "It's part your business, part mine — I guess you don't call me to mind, sir."

He did not, for he was slowly shaking his head, and she went on. "Do you call up the time, sir, when a poor little girl asked you for money on the train, and you wouldn't give it?"

A gleam of recollection — not agreeable recollection, passed over his face.

"Your son kind of took pity on me that day. He's got a nice face, sir, bright and shiny-looking, and he's awful handsome — favours his ma. Now, sir, I guess I'd like to see that young fellow good and prospering, and not standing in the way of sinners, nor sitting in the seat of the scornful."

Mr. Waysmith acknowledged these good wishes by a stately bow.

"But first I must go back on my tracks," said 'Tilda Jane, pulling herself up briskly. "You'd like to have some account of me since I last set eyes on you. I was in a peck of trouble then, and I've had a few quarts since, but things have changed with me, sir — I suppose you know the Tracys?"

Mr. Waysmith again bowed.

"They're good folks, sir, truly good. I go and see them once in so often, and they fixed things all up between me and that old man."

"What old man?"

"Mr. Dillson, sir, — he that was your book-keeper. Don't you mind, I was coming to keep house for him?"

Her companion's heavy face brightened at the mention of a familiar name, and he assured her that he did recall the circumstance.

"Yes, sir," she continued, "the Tracys got Mr. Dillson, or grampa, as I call him, to say I could bide with him, and they used to send us tasty things to eat. Then Mr. Tracy got Hank that good place in your mill as assistant book-keeper."

This was not news to Mr. Waysmith, and he wrinkled his forehead in slight impatience.

'Tilda Jane felt his impatience, but she was launched, and could not stop herself. "Well, sir, as I was saying, I'm living with grampa, and I'm getting to set more store by him every day. He isn't all tiger as your son said he was. I've found some lamb in him, and I'd just like your son to come and see him on one of his lammie days. If I was sure when one was coming on I'd send for him, but grampa's chancy — I like your son: he's so free-like and chatty, and always stops me in the

"AND THIS WAS THE DOG WHO RARELY CARESSED HIS MASTER."

street, and asks me how I'm getting on — I'm not afraid of him, like I am of you, sir."

What was the girl working up to? Mr. Waysmith withdrew the thumb marking a place in the partly closed magazine on his knee, and, putting it on the table, took up another. He was master of a number of small devices calculated to hurry a long-winded caller.

He was just about to stand up, when something occurred that effectually aroused his interest. His dog, the quiet, undemonstrative Muffles, was coming deliberately from his corner to inspect this small girl.

Mr. Waysmith was quietly amazed. He watched the dog go up to 'Tilda Jane, sniff curiously about her dress, then stand on his hind legs, calmly search her face, and, as if satisfied and charmed with his scrutiny, gently lick her hand — and this was the dog who rarely caressed his master, and never by any chance gave a stranger more than a searching glance.

After watching him go back to his corner, Mr. Waysmith said, "Are you fond of dogs?"

"Oh! yes, sir," she said eloquently, "don't you mind that day I met you on the train, I had one dog in my arms, and the other in the baggage car? I just love them. I think I must be a kind of sister to dogs."

He said nothing, and she continued, "Don't be jealous, sir, of that there dog, which I see is a quiet one that doesn't favour strangers. He just knows I love him, and he's trying to tell me he knows it, because we may never meet again."

"Go on with your story," said Mr. Waysmith in a non-committal way.

"Well, sir," she said feverishly, "I'm right in the Dillson family now, and we are quite a family. There's Ruth Ann, the cow; and Milkweed, the horse; and our new orphan, Perletta; and the pigeons and sparrows; and the dear, comfy hens; — and that reminds me, I ought to be home now greasing the hens' legs, 'cause they've got the scaly disease, but I thought your son's soul ought to come first. I love animals, but I always make them come after the humans — Now, being a member of the family, I can't help taking in that grampa isn't a good sleeper," and she paused and closely scrutinized her hearer, to see whether he showed any sign of emotion at this statement.

He did not. It was in no wise remarkable, that an old man should be a light sleeper.

"Grampa's got something on his mind, sir," said the little girl, hastily, "and I guess you're the only one that could get it off. It's been on ever since I come here. Last year, I thought it was trouble on account of sixty dollars he lost in the street, and

never got, but it's not the sixty dollars. This is higher trouble, but I know you could get it off."

Instead of being overcome by this announcement, Mr. Waysmith stifled a yawn. He wished this young girl would stop prosing about an old man who had long since left his employ, and would take herself away. Her announcement of business must have been a mere pretext to beg.

"Dillson was a good, trustworthy book-keeper in his day," he said, patronizingly, "take this, and buy some little delicacy for him."

'Tilda Jane would not touch the five dollar note he was offering her, and her face grew crimson.

"I'm not begging, sir. It's mind trouble that I'm trying to explain."

Well, why did she not explain it, he wondered. Why did she hesitate, and stammer, and fall into such a state of confusion?

"I'm not set in my opinions, sir," she said, reading his thoughts surely, "I'm not sure I'm on the right track, yet I'm all broke up about poor grampa. If he confesses to you, I guess you'd forgive him, particularly as I've got something to tell about forgiving someone else."

Mr. Waysmith looked coldly interested, and a trifle suspicious.

"Oh! it's a lovely thing to forgive," exclaimed

the little girl, eloquently, "to have your heart all melted down and soft like the rivers in the spring, and not to have icy feelings any more. I used to be a little mad with grampa, and now I can't get mad, 'cause I've given it all up. I'd like to see him happy, sir."

The lumber merchant, only slightly touched by her eulogium on the pleasures of forgiveness, had suddenly become possessed of a lively curiosity. Dillson had done him some wrong, and this girl had found it out.

"If you speak out plainly, and tell me what you have to say, I will consider your statements," he remarked, judicially. "I pay no attention to enigmas."

"I don't know what enigmas are," responded 'Tilda Jane, desperately, "but I know something about your son, you'd give ten piles of lumber to know."

Her companion regarded her for the silent and solemn space of one minute, then he said, "You wish to effect a bargain — you have a secret with regard to my son, to barter for my forgiveness of some wrong-doing on the part of Dillson."

"It doesn't sound pretty, to put it that way," said 'Tilda Jane, struggling with some inner and powerful emotion, "but let it go — now will you promise to say, 'That thing is past and gone — I

forgive you, and don't yell any more in your sleep.'"

"The only way in which Dillson has been able to injure me is by defrauding me of money. He probably has done that," said Mr. Waysmith coolly.

"S'pose he had," replied 'Tilda Jane, wildly, "s'pose he had taken money — s'pose he didn't think — then he was sorry. What would you do? Would you forgive him?"

Mr. Waysmith did not like being cross-questioned by one so immeasurably his inferior. However, he wished to obtain the rest of her information, so he said calmly, "As a general thing, I punish, I do not forgive."

"You don't. Oh, sir, why not?"

"Forgiveness doesn't pay, my girl. There is no such thing in business."

"You wouldn't drag him to jail, would you?" she cried, her eyes wide open in horror.

"Calm yourself, and lower your voice. When I understand the case more fully, I will decide what to do — Now for your information about my son."

"Oh! I can't tell you, sir — not unless you promise to go see grampa, and tell him you forgive him, and let him lie in peace in his bed."

"You ought to go into trade, young girl. You would make your fortune."

"Oh! I'm not thinking of trading. I'm think-

ing of having people happy and comfortable. Oh, sir! you will come and see grampa, and you will forgive him?"

"When Dillson comes to me, and confesses what he has done, it will be time enough for me to say what I will do."

"But he's scared out of his life, sir. He's more afraid of you than of a great big, ugly bear, with a sore paw."

"He was evidently not scared enough of me to keep from injuring me."

'Tilda Jane was terribly upset. She rose from her seat, and stood opening and shutting her mouth without uttering a word, and nervously clasping and unclasping her hands. "Oh! those little pig eyes," she muttered to herself. "He's just steeped in selfishness. He isn't willing to forgive — he's mad with grampa, maybe he'll tell him what I've said, and grampa'll be mad with me — oh, dear! I wish I'd been born without a tongue — I've done no good — I've done no good."

"Have you anything more to say, young girl?" asked Mr. Waysmith, deliberately.

He had risen now, and was staring down at her in a magnificent way.

"He wants me to go," said 'Tilda Jane between her closed teeth. "I shan't tell him anything about his son. I shan't give him the wink he'd be glad

to get. Let him find out," and she pressed her lips together. "Oh! Lord, keep me from saying anything hateful to him."

With a last reproachful stare, she hurriedly walked out of the room, looking at him peculiarly over her shoulder as she did so, and keeping her mouth tightly closed.

Her manner was sufficient. Mr. Waysmith understood her, and, with a frown, he stepped to the door, and turned the key in the lock.

'Tilda Jane heard him, and stamping her foot with rage and impatience, she hurried out of the house, and down the steps to the gravelled walk.

Though she had gone, she had made an impression. She had spoiled Mr. Waysmith's evening. All interest had left the magazine pages, and he let the one in his hand slip to the floor, and stared thoughtfully at the fire. Did any danger threaten his boy — the only child he had, or was this girl a story-teller?

Probably she was, she had concocted some fable in order to wheedle him into forgiveness of his pensioner Dillson. Datus was doing well with his studies. He had safe companions, he bade fair to make a model man. True he talked a good deal, and boasted more than his father liked, but those were faults of youth. The girl was a dishonourable and scheming little witch, and, with sudden

anger and impatience against her, the merchant went to the book-case for his Shakespeare, and forced himself to read. A few minutes later, he closed the volume with an irritated exclamation. Staring him in the face were the lines,

"I forgive you, as I would be forgiven."

He would go to bed. His head ached, the room was hot, and he was just rising and extending a hand to turn off the lights, when he heard a tapping at the window beyond him.

CHAPTER VII

HIS ONLY SON

He turned sharply round. Someone wished to come in the low, French window, and to his surprise, he discovered the dark face of the irrepressible orphan. A face subdued and calm however, and with a decidedly red nose. She had been crying.

In obedience to her pleading gesture he unfastened the window and slowly opened it.

"Sir," gasped the little girl quickly, but gently, "I've not got one drop of breath left, but I've come to say that you were ugly to me just now, and I was ugly to you, but I'm sorry, and I guess you are, too. I ought to forgive you for not forgiving grampa, and I'll tell you about your son. Come up close, so no one will hear."

Mr. Waysmith did not like the informality of this second interview, yet his strange caller had so whetted his curiosity that he was extremely anxious to hear what she had to say, and he invited, or rather commanded, her to enter the room.

'Tilda Jane obeyed him pantingly, and fairly

dropping in a seat. She began in excited sentences, "That curly-headed boy of yours is getting to be a young man, but I guess to you he seems like a little fellow yet. And I, though I daresay he's more than eighteen, feel like he was a child, and I can just see him peeking over the edge of one of those pits the Bible tells us of — Maybe you don't know some good French people that live next grampa's. The man works in the Penobscot Bakery, and his wife's a great friend of mine, and she tells me there's a bad 'Cajien way down at the end of French Row by the river, and he lets big boys come to his house and play cards for money."

Mr. Waysmith looked hard and unbelieving. His son was in the house every night of his life.

'Tilda Jane's eyes were devouring his face. "You don't credit me, sir. Well, you just watch, and if I could tell you how it makes me shiver to set you spying on that nice son of yours, you'd pity me. But it's to save his soul, sir, for the French people are very firm about curbing children, and they say he runs with a bad set of young men at the 'Cajien's. Not French boys, sir. They're town boys, and they don't go in the evenings, when you might be apt to smell a rat, but they go afternoons when college is out, and you think they are at that place where they leap and play. It's something like a man's name — Jim something."

"Gymnasium," supplied Mr. Waysmith.

"That's it, sir, they say they'll 'cut Jim,' and they run to the Frenchman's. You lie in wait for them, sir, you'll see."

Mr. Waysmith showed no other sign of emotion than a profound thoughtfulness, but 'Tilda Jane was apprehensive.

"Don't get mad with him, sir, please don't," she said pleadingly. "The ladyboards used to get mad with me, and it didn't do a mite of good, but if anyone talked soft, I just broke all up. I guess if you'd take him with you, sir, or get him in with nice boys, he'd be all right — and don't let him know I told on him, sir."

Mr. Waysmith's eyes were fixed on the carpet. He believed now every word that the girl was saying, but he was filled with a profound chagrin. He knew the duplicity of some forms of young manhood, yet he had imagined that his lad was a transparent lad, that every thought in his youthful breast was open to him, and that he could read his guileless face as he could read a book — and this son, this model son, had been deceiving him, and moreover had been taking pleasure in the deceit.

However, he must dismiss this girl, and, raising his head, he said hastily, "I thank you for your information. May I ask you to tell no other person of this?"

"I wouldn't blab, sir, not if you gave me another dog," said 'Tilda Jane earnestly. "If you knew what I've gone through, before I could screw myself up to say this much — it was as if you were the dentist, sir, and had your tongs all ready to haul out one of my teeth — good night, sir. Don't get in any cave of despair about your son, for the good French people say he isn't cut out for any card-sharper. They said as how you'd fetch him round all right."

"Good night," said Mr. Waysmith, calmly, and, going to the window, he unlocked it, and, though 'Tilda Jane threw him several pleading glances, he gave her no assurances, either with regard to grampa or Datus.

"He's thinking it over," murmured 'Tilda Jane, "he's slower than a tortoise, but maybe he'll get there quicker than the hare, which is me."

Mr. Waysmith stood watching the little dark figure scurrying down the path. Then, closing the window, he stood leaning heavily against the frame. His boy an incipient gambler — What could he do, how could he control this youthful fever, how could he, a reserved, phlegmatic man, express to the volatile youth his intense affection for him? Perhaps he had not been enough with him. Perhaps he had been too cold, too uninterested in the boy's pursuits.

No it was not that. Datus knew that he loved him. Datus was proud of him as a father. There was something lacking in the boy's make-up. He had a weak sense of honour, and he was self-indulgent. He did not consider the end, and now probably he had got in with enticing companions, and was following their lead. Now that he thought of it, Charlie True, one of his best friends, was the son of a man who belonged to a family notorious for their love of gambling. The father did not live at home, but the lad had probably inherited the family proclivity.

After some time, he roused himself, and went into the hall.

"Where is Mr. Datus?" he asked, addressing Irish Mary who was locking the front door.

"He's jist gone up to his bed, sir, an' I don't think he's been after comin' down since he went up."

"Ask him to come to the library."

He went back to his room, and sat down by the fire, and presently his son appeared, careless and unsuspecting.

"You caught me in the nick of time, papa, I was just going to undress. Do you want something?"

"Why do you stand in that hunchback fashion?" asked his father irritably. "Straighten your shoulders, boy."

Datus took a more soldier-like attitude, but Mr. Waysmith continued in the same dissatisfied tone. "I am spending a good deal of money on athletics for you, but I don't see that your figure improves. What time do you go to the gymnasium?"

"At four o'clock, sir, when afternoon classes are over."

"I will meet you there to-morrow, and have a talk with your teacher. He's neglecting you, according to your appearance. Stretch out your hand."

Datus, going from red to white, extended a pretty, girlish hand.

"Soft and flabby," said his father. "I shall have something to say to — what is your instructor's name?"

"Mackintyre," said Datus feebly.

"He must be scamping his work," said Mr. Waysmith, disdainfully. "I met your friend True to-day, and he looks as white as milk, and just about as flabby as you. Don't you ever run on that out-door track?"

"Yes, sir," said Datus almost inaudibly.

The young man was doing a rapid amount of thinking. Did his father know anything? If he did, how much did he know? Would it not be better to undeceive him now than to have him con-

fronted with Mackintyre to-morrow, and have a painful explanation at the gymnasium? Mackintyre was an honourable man. He would not lie, he would tell Mr. Waysmith frankly that his son had not been coming to his classes regularly.

"Papa," said Datus, stammeringly, "I must confess to you that I have not been going to the gymnasium every day."

"Why not?" asked his father bluntly.

"Well, sir, I — that is True and I, and some of the fellows, found it slow, and we have been going to other places."

"To the rink?" inquired Mr. Waysmith, "have you been skating?"

"Not much lately, sir. We go to different places — sometimes down town."

"Has it occurred to you that this non-attendance at the gymnasium was a breach of contract on your part? If you no longer wished to go, why did you not ask me to permit you to leave? I have been paying out hard-earned money for instruction you did not receive."

"I'm sorry, papa," ejaculated Datus with a crimson face. "I did not look at it in that light. It was hard on you. I will begin to-morrow, and go regularly."

"But what about the past," said his father calmly. "How will you make that right?"

Datus hesitated an instant, then he said frankly, "I don't know — please tell me, sir."

"You are actually asking for advice," said Mr. Waysmith, musingly, "you, a modern stripling. Well, that is a step in advance. We old fellows were made to sit at the feet of our parents when young, and take advice whether we wanted it or not, and were also made to act upon it. The present generation thinks itself wiser than its fathers."

"I don't think myself wiser than you," said Datus humbly.

"Luxury is spoiling you," continued his father, still in a musing tone. "I had little as a boy, not enough, perhaps. Having obtained a fortune, I delight in lavishing it on my children. You have had toys, pets, fine clothes, trips abroad — more than you can stand, poor lad. I have weakened you, instead of strengthening you. In common with thousands of other rich men's sons, you are agreeably wending your way to the dogs, and when I say dogs, I don't mean dogs."

"You mean devil," said Datus with a gleam of humour in his blue eyes.

"Yes, my lad, and that you can take my statement so coolly shows the weak, sappy, moral fibre you have been running to — Now, what are we to do about this?"

Datus uncomfortably stubbed his toe back and forth against a footstool.

"Are you willing to help me in trying to make a man of yourself?" asked Mr. Waysmith calmly.

Datus gave him a reproachful glance. "I want to be a good, smart man, sir, just like you."

His father's face softened. "You have not been afraid of me, Datus. You have not felt that I was uninterested in you?"

"Oh! no, sir, only you are so taken up with your business. I hate to disturb you, though I'd often like to talk to you," he added frankly.

Mr. Waysmith winced, and his eyes fell before the youthful ones fixed in admiration on him.

"Perhaps I have been partly to blame," he said slowly. "In future, we will mend that. Now, Datus, you want discipline."

The lad shuddered, but said bravely, "All right, sir."

"When you play cards, do you mostly win or lose?" asked his father.

Datus' face became a fiery red. His father knew about his card parties. "Sir," he said hesitatingly, "I mostly lose, but I have a few winnings here," and he jingled some loose coin in his pocket.

"How much?" asked Mr. Waysmith briefly, "count it."

Datus drew out the silver. "One dollar and forty cents," he said shamefacedly.

"Give it to Mr. Tracy for his poor people. You will, of course, not go to the Acadian's any more?"

"No, sir, and I promise you not to touch a card again until you give me leave."

"Very good, so far — now what has your allowance for pocket money been?"

"Seven dollars a week, sir."

"Simpleton that I have been," said Mr. Waysmith angrily, "some families live on less — I cut your allowance down to a dollar fifty a week. Your clothes, and books and food are bought for you. Why should a mere stripling like you have seven dollars a week. Upon my word, it is the fault of too-indulgent parents that their boys go astray."

"Some fellows have more," suggested Datus.

"Trusty fellows might have a hundred a week," retorted Mr. Waysmith. "Weaklings like you should have a nickel only at a time."

Datus winced, but said nothing.

"Every day after college is over, you report to me at the mill," said Mr. Waysmith. "I'll find work there for you to do, and if I discover that you are deceiving me in any way, I shall pack you right off to your grandfather's."

"Not to that farm in the woods?" asked Datus in dismay.

"The same, so toe the mark, if you want to stay here."

"There's no college there," remarked Datus.

"There's a school that was good enough for me when I was a lad, and it is better now, but if you go there, it will be to do farm work."

"There are hardly any neighbours," pursued Datus, "not a chap my own age."

"All the better. Middle-aged and old men won't lead you into mischief."

"I guess I'll behave myself and stay here," said Datus shrewdly. "You won't send me away from you, will you, daddy," and he laid a cajoling hand on his father's arm.

Mr. Waysmith turned and looked him in the eyes. For a few seconds, they remained motionless — the man sitting staring into the relieved and roguish face so near his own. The lad was as quiescent as his father. He was weak in some ways, yet there was a strain of bravery in him.

"Go to bed, boy," said Mr. Waysmith, shaking off the caressing hand. "There's something about your mental make-up that I don't like, but maybe we'll straighten you out."

Datus suddenly flung his arms round the broad shoulders near him, and after giving them a boyish, bearish hug, he scampered from the room.

Mr. Waysmith sat shaking his head by the fire.

"What is wrong with the boys of to-day? The riches of our hearts and our pockets are lavished on them, and yet they are shrewd and commercial in their instincts, and at the same time self-indulgent and short-sighted. There must be something wrong with our system of education. It's all hard intellect. That boy wants heart culture. I've more genuine affection for him in my little finger than he has for me in his whole body — and yet he makes more show with what he has than I do with all I have, that he hasn't. I don't know what I'm to do, unless I stop doing. He has had everything since he was born, and he does nothing for anybody. Perhaps that's it — he's in the grip of egotism and is being slowly eaten up. I'll set him to work serving others. He doesn't know the joy of service, and he doesn't understand the value of money. I was a mischievous boy in some ways, but I never was a rogue, and I was crammed with ambition — then my father was a poor man."

The merchant sat for some time in deep reverie, then he said aloud, "How men are misjudged. That young orphan here to-night thinks I am a hard-hearted monster, and my Datus is an earthly paragon. She once begged from me on the train, and I, a man pestered to death with little demoralized children teasing for pennies, would not, as I thought, contribute to her degradation. Datus,

without a care of her welfare, gave to her. As it happened, hers was a deserving case — she is out of the common. I will help her if possible, but first I must look into Dillson's affair. Heigho!" and rising, he stretched out his arms with a perplexed gesture. "They say children are a blessing from the Lord — a thorny blessing in some cases."

CHAPTER VIII

MILD FORGIVENESS

GRAMPA was poorly. He had had more bad nights than usual lately, and very often, when the morning came, he was not able to leave his bed.

"And it's such a shame, 'cause we're having such a nice thaw," murmured 'Tilda Jane, "and the weather is so soft. You ought to be out drinking in this sweet air, like the cow and Milkweed in the yard, and the dogs, and pigeons and sparrows."

She was trying not to harden her heart against Mr. Waysmith. For a few days after her interview with him she had had a lingering hope that he might come and say he had forgiven poor grampa, but he had not done so. He had not called, he had not written, he had sent no message. Well, she had done her duty, and she was glad to hear through the Melançons that young Waysmith went no more to the bad 'Cajien's. His father had stopped that, so she had done some good.

One fine Saturday afternoon she was in grampa's

room. She had been reading the Bible to him, and now sat with the book open on her lap, thoughtfully gazing out at the sociable Milkweed who had come from the barn, and stood in the sunny yard outside, with her head close to the window. She was eating, one by one, a row of sweet apples that 'Tilda Jane had placed on the sill, and occasionally the little girl's loving glance wandered from her, and across the yard, down French Row where the big, yellow sun was slipping behind the houses to the pine wood along the river.

"Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid," the words were a mockery to poor grampa, with his deadly fear of Mr. Waysmith, and he had been listening to her with his face turned toward the wall.

"There's a ring at the front door," he said, presently, and as if grateful for the interruption.

'Tilda Jane started. She had been so absorbed in her musings that she had not heard it, and, stumbling over grampa's crutches, she hurried from the room.

To her surprise, and utter paralysis of tongue — a condition of things that did not often overtake her — she was confronted by Mr. Waysmith.

"Good afternoon," he said politely, and slightly smiling at her confusion. "Is Mr. Dillson in?"

"Y-yes, sir," stammered 'Tilda Jane.

"May I see him?" and, as she silently turned, he stepped after her into the house.

'Tilda Jane left him in the parlour, and hurried back to the bedroom. "Grampa dear," she said, so eagerly that her words tripped over each other, "Mr. Waysmith's here, and he wants to see you, and I can bring him in, can't I?"

Grampa's pale face grew paler. In all the years of his retirement the rich merchant had not once called to ask after his health — but he had better see him now. There might be some question of his pension at stake.

"Let him in," he said shortly, and 'Tilda Jane hastened back to the parlour. "Grampa 'll see you, sir. Please step this way."

How had she ever dared to speak as familiarly to this man, as she had done a few days ago? There was something exceedingly awe-inspiring about him, and, hearing his heavy tread behind her, she shivered, and murmured, "I feel as if there was a monument pacing after me."

When they reached the bed-room door, Mr. Waysmith turned to her. "My son is out in the sleigh. He has a small parcel for you. Perhaps you will go and get it."

'Tilda Jane took the hint given, and hurried out to the big handsome sleigh, where a dignified coachman sat stiffly holding the reins. After a hasty

glance at the two, powerful black horses, 'Tilda Jane nodded in a somewhat preoccupied fashion to Datus who was lounging on the back seat.

He took off his cap, and held it in his hand, as if she were the grandest lady in Ciscasset. Then, seizing a parcel, he sprang out of the sleigh, and said, "Let us go in the house. You may get cold out here."

'Tilda Jane preceded him up the short walk to the front door, and ushered him into the little parlour, that to the lad seemed very amusing with its fiery red carpet, and funereal black haircloth furniture. "Here is your present," he said, handing her the parcel. "Mamma and papa have been in Boston and they bought it for you."

"Won't you sit down?" asked the little girl soberly, and, seating herself on the shiny sofa, she unfastened string and paper, and then gave a gasp of pure ecstasy.

Before her was a good-sized pink silk-lined work-basket, with pockets, pincushion, scissors, thread, needles, silver thimble, and many other conveniences for an expert needle-woman.

After a while, the blissful little girl got her breath and burst forth into ejaculatory remarks that Datus listened to with an amused grin, storing them in his memory to repeat to his mother.

"Won't I darn now — won't I make grampa's

socks look fine — and Hank's! Won't I mend their shirts, and coats and everything — I'll sew like the wind!"

Finally, her strong business instinct asserting itself, she said, "Now, who do you say I am to thank for this beauty thing?"

"My mother and father."

"Well, will you tell your mother, please, that I've never had a thing that gave me such happy pain, 'cause if I'd had a real mother, this is likely what she'd have given me."

"Did you have an unreal mother?" inquired Datus, waggishly.

"I was a mistake, I think," said 'Tilda Jane wistfully. "Some people have children, then they seem surprised-like, as if to say, 'What in the world did you want to come and bother me for?' — I didn't intend to bother any one," she added apologetically, "but here I am — what can I do?"

The petted boy could not in the faintest degree enter into the orphan's feelings, but he felt that she was voicing an inner plaint, and he said consolingly, "I'll give my mother your message. She is coming to see you some day. I heard my father ask her."

"Your father ask her?" repeated 'Tilda Jane slowly.

"Yes, he did."

'Tilda Jane wrinkled her forehead thoughtfully,

" Seems to me I size up some folks all wrong. I believe your father is better than he looks."

" He's the best man in Ciscasset," replied Datus warmly.

'Tilda Jane said nothing, but went on nursing the pink-lined basket in her arms. After a time, she said meditatively, " He's talking a good while to grampa. I'm glad."

" Yes, something about business," said the lad carelessly, and he looked bored, and went to the window.

'Tilda Jane put down her basket, and said anxiously, " Don't you want to come out in the yard and see our new horse? We can go the front way, so we won't break in on your father and grampa."

" All right," said Datus, and, with the little girl, he sauntered out through the garden to the yard.

" Bon jour, bébé," he called to one of the little Melançons who was passing along the sidewalk.

'Tilda Jane turned suddenly, and, without premeditation, asked, " How did you learn French? "

Datus did not suspect her knowledge of his former visits to the home of the bad Acadian, and, with a smile, informed her that he used to have some French friends, but now he had cut their acquaintance.

'Tilda Jane would not pursue so dangerous a topic of conversation, and, saying hastily, " I sup-

pose such as you always have to study languages," she launched into an enthusiastic description of the good qualities of the beautiful Milkweed who was coming to meet them.

While she and Datus were chatting briskly, the two elder persons were confronting each other in mutual embarrassment. They really had little to say, and after a polite inquiry as to the state of his pensioner's health, and another remark with regard to the beauty of the day, Mr. Waysmith lapsed into silence.

Grampa lay quietly in the bed, and the Bible that 'Tilda Jane had left open near him caught Mr. Waysmith's attention. Taking it up, his eye fell on a verse, "But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

That covered the case, and, to expedite matters, he read it aloud.

Grampa looked at him strangely. What had come over Mr. Waysmith. An hour ago, he would have said it was the most improbable thing in the world that the lumber merchant should be sitting reading the Bible to him. Yet here he was doing it, and seeming quite natural in the act.

"Dillson," said Mr. Waysmith, as he closed the book, and put it back on the bed. "I have just come from Boston."

Grampa said nothing, and his caller went on, "The object of my journey there was to see Grover. You remember Grover, once your helper at the mill?"

Grampa did indeed remember Grover, the assistant book-keeper in his day, and in a somewhat husky voice said he did.

Mr. Waysmith paused a minute. There was something exceedingly pathetic to him in the spectacle of that old white head peeping at him from the cover of the bedclothes. The old man's hands had grasped the sheet, and drawn it up close under his neck — his attitude was uneasy yet resolved. There was no weakening yet, and his caller went on.

"Grover and I had a long conversation, and naturally a part of it related to you. As he had been for so long a time intimately associated with you, I asked him whether he agreed with me in forming a high estimate of your honesty and faithfulness when in my employ, and in that of my father. He said that he did."

Grampa was perspiring freely. Little rills of moisture ran down his cheeks, yet he kept the clothes tucked under his neck, and his beady eyes fixed on his visitor.

Mr. Waysmith continued meditatively, looking out the window and talking as if to himself. "There

are several classes of men in the world. One in which I am specially interested is that composed of persons who are, on the whole, models of integrity. Yet, at some time in the lives of these good people, there will be an unaccountable lapse from this strict integrity — a lapse that only their Maker or the devil who tempts them can account for."

Grampa had never been tempted, judging by his unaltered position, and expression, and Mr. Waysmith went on, "Another class that I am fond of studying is that of persons drifting little by little, thanks to heredity or environment, into fixed and unalterable habits of wrong-doing. They are deceitful habitually. They can not help themselves, but between them and the occasional sinners who recover themselves nobly there is, in my opinion, a great gulf fixed."

Grampa had apparently only a distant interest in sinners of any class, and rising, Mr. Waysmith said, "Good-bye Dillson, I must go, but first let me say something that perhaps may sound impertinent, although it is not meant so, and that also might be taken as too much along the line of guessing for a business man. It is this — without altering my present opinion of you in the least, I wish to say, that if you ever, while keeping my books, made any mistakes of any kind, and thereby fretted yourself into irritation over them, I think that the

occasion was not worthy of the results. A frank statement to me would have brought relief."

Grampa did not care for frank statements, unless he was furious with rage, which he certainly never would be with Mr. Waysmith, and, comprehending this, the merchant took a sudden resolution.

He had found out what he wished to know. He and Grover had both been mistaken. The little orphan girl, with her heart aglow with sympathy and love for Dillson, had been right. There was no indifference nor surprise on the old man's face now, as there would have been had his former employer's suspicion been baseless. He was suffering — suffering acutely and visibly, and, accurately guessing at the cause of this emotion, Mr. Waysmith stepped up to his pillow.

"Dillson," he said kindly, but firmly, "I have reason to believe that you once, through mistake, design or otherwise, defrauded me of a certain sum of money. How much was it?"

Mr. Waysmith was standing so close that the beady eyes had to roll upward to look at him. They did not flinch. Grampa would not confess, neither would he deny.

After a long time, his former employer's compelling glance overcame him. "Two hundred and fifty dollars," he said in a rasping voice, then his purple lids closed over his eyes.

"Two hundred and fifty dollars," repeated the merchant, "is one's peace of mind worth so small a sum?"

Grampa would not commit himself to an opinion.

"What was the manner of taking it?" inquired Mr. Waysmith, sternly.

"Conscience money," replied Grampa.

"Someone had stolen it from me?"

"From your father — former book-keeper — false entries."

"What was his name?"

"Percy."

"And he returned the money to the firm through you, and you kept it?"

"I did."

"Strange, strange," murmured Mr. Waysmith, then through the window his eye fell on 'Tilda Jane and Datus, who, accompanied by the interested Milkweed, were feeding the pigeons and sparrows. That girl had rendered him a great service. His son, now that he had come under his direct supervision, was improving, and he was enjoying his companionship.

"Dillson," he said with sudden animation, and with a brief smile that made his heavy face lovable, "who am I, that I should appoint myself judge over you? I too have to crave forgiveness for sins. I am an egotist — a stubborn worldling. Having

been often deceived, I seem to have lost faith in my fellow man. From my heart, I forgive you. The money is though it had not been. Put it out of your thoughts. Let your remaining years be happy."

Grampa was not satisfied. "Subtract it from pension," he said hoarsely.

"Your pension is a fair one," said Mr. Waysmith kindly, "yet you would miss that sum. I can not cut it down."

"Subtract it," muttered the old man.

Mr. Waysmith narrowly inspected him. The glistening eyes were distended and unnatural. "Very well," he said hastily, but in his own mind a plan to make good the deficiency suddenly unfolded itself. He would place the subtracted sum in the bank to the credit of 'Tilda Jane.

"That young girl you have with you," he said in an interested tone, "appears devoted to you, and intelligent beyond her years."

"She told on me," ejaculated Grampa.

Mr. Waysmith smiled. "She loves you, Dillson. She was greatly exercised over an endeavour to secure your happiness."

Grampa expressed no gratitude to 'Tilda Jane. Indeed, he began to look so strangely that his companion was alarmed.

The mental strain of the return to old days and

old affairs had been too much for him, and Mr. Waysmith hurried from the room.

"Datus, go for Dr. Gresler," he said quickly, and, without waiting to hear the rest of the order, 'Tilda Jane dashed into the house.

Grampa was having some kind of a fit, and with a white face, she ran for the water bucket.

CHAPTER IX

AN UNEXPECTED REQUEST

A FEW afternoons later, 'Tilda Jane and grampa were sitting in the kitchen. Perletta had gone down town to buy some sausages for their supper, and Hank had not yet come home from the mill.

Grampa was eyeing the little girl curiously, as she sat turning up a hem in the fine, warm dressing-gown that Hank had recently bought for him.

'Tilda Jane had her pretty work-basket beside her, and, as she turned to it for some more thread, she said, " 'Tis a pity, grampa, that this lovely thing was so long, that you tripped on it, but I'm making it all right."

Grampa did not reply at once. His thoughts were in the past. After a time, he said slowly, " You told Mr. Waysmith on me."

'Tilda Jane dropped her work, and stared at him. Then she said, " 'Course I did, and I'm so happy in my mind about it that I don't know what to do."

Grampa frowned, and in his turn stared at her.

Her face was shrewd but composed, and she was surveying him "like a little fox," he muttered.

"You stole on me at night," he went on, grumblingly, "you listened to talk not meant for your ears, and it ain't the first time, for you did it two years agone."

"Sure I did," she said eloquently, "and I tell you now, as I told you then — could I lie in bed warm and comfy, and hear you moaning and crying and fussing in your sleep like a poor dog that has lost her pups? — no, I went creepy, creepy downstairs to see if I could do anything for you. I did it two years ago, and I've done it this year, and I'll do it next year, if you go and pick up any more trouble."

"Don't you dare," said the old man, his face becoming red. "You stay in your room at night."

"All right, grampa," she said diplomatically, "I guess I'll have no more occasion to roam. You're easy in your mind now, and as quiet as one of Job's mice. I guess that the plague times in your life are all over."

"You needn't have told," reiterated the old man stubbornly.

"Oh! grampa," said 'Tilda Jane with animation, and, throwing down her work, she rose and stood over him. "Some folks are ugly some of the time,

other folks are ugly none of the time, but no folks ought to be ugly all the time, like you used to be. Seemed to me, that you was going to die, and I thought something ought to be done. You were like a poor old orphan that had no one to care for you but me. I know boys and girls ought to be seen and not heard, but what could I do? I tried Hank with hints thrown out, but he wouldn't catch them."

"I s'pose you told Hank the whole rigmarole," said grampa disagreeably.

"He doesn't even dream of it," said 'Tilda Jane, earnestly. "I took good care not to blab your sorrows to anyone. That's why I went myself to Mr. Waysmith. You know, and he knows, and me and God, and we'll never tell, will we, dear?" and, as she spoke, she tenderly patted the bald spot on the top of his white head.

Grampa was silent. He was moved despite himself, and did not know what to say.

'Tilda Jane went on soothingly, "I blame myself for not getting at the root of your trouble sooner. I used to think it was that sixty dollars that was bothering you. I might have known it wasn't natural for you to be bellering at me so much of the time, and hurling your crutches about, and smashing dishes, just for sixty dollars."

Grampa's head drooped a little under 'Tilda Jane's

caressing touch, and he gazed shamefacedly at his crutches.

"It wasn't reason," she went on, "for you weren't a bad enough man to cut up that way, and, when I found out how I could clear up everything for you, wasn't I, your little girl, bound to stand by you?"

Grampa raised his head. 'Tilda Jane had done wisely, yet he was the man of the house, and to prevent this young thing from crowing over him, because she had brought him relief, he would assert himself a little.

"We'll let bygones be bygones," he said, stiffly, "but spying times are over, and don't you bother your young head about my affairs any more. I've had a way of talking things over in my sleep, as I told you two years back — I've had it all my life. Don't you listen any more," and he emphasized his remarks by a sturdy tap of one of his crutches on the floor.

"I hear," said 'Tilda Jane, affectionately, "and I will heed. I guess I'll have nothing more to call for spying. You're just the best old man in Ciscasset now, except when the habit of giving a growl comes over you, and I hope you'll live to be a hundred."

"I'd like a cup of tea," said grampa gently.

"All right," exclaimed 'Tilda Jane, "tea you shall have as long as I'm alive to make it — good

and strong, with the thickest of cream in it, and lots of sugar — and couldn't you eat a bite of gingerbread with it, grampa — just fresh baked?"

"I might take a morsel," he said obligingly.

'Tilda Jane ran to put fresh water in the teakettle, and, as she set it on the stove, she said, "Now, grampa, while you drink your tea, I'm going to run next door a spell, to speak to Mrs. Melançon. I'm bothered about our hens. They don't seem very fit, and she knows a lot about them. If you want me, just ring the big bell. I'll put it beside you — open the window and give a good peal. I'll not be more than five minutes, and Perletta'll likely be here, before I'm back."

Grampa nodded, and, a short time later, sat alone drinking his tea, and thinking gratefully of the little orphan girl who was as attentive and respectful as if she were his own daughter. He did not praise her to her face. "Would spoil her," he muttered. "I hate uppish girls."

Strange to say, not long after 'Tilda Jane stepped out the back door, someone rang the bell at the front one. "Who's that?" said grampa, setting down his empty cup. "I guess I'll go see. I feel fifty per cent. better these last few days," and, seizing his crutches, he went nimbly through the narrow hall to the front door.

To his amazement, though he only gazed stolidly

before him, Mr. Waysmith stood in the doorway, with a basket on his arm, and a smile on his face.

"Come in, sir," said grampa at last, "come to the kitchen. It's the only warm place in the house," and he hobbled before him.

Mr. Waysmith followed closely, and, on arriving in the kitchen, sat down in a chair just opposite grampa's own comfortable seat.

"Are you alone?" asked the merchant.

Grampa nodded.

"So much the better. I have brought you something that I daresay will astonish you," and he glanced at the basket that he had set close to the stove.

"You can't astonish me," said grampa grimly, "I'm too old."

"The old have certainly seen many things," said Mr. Waysmith, calmly, "yet I daresay, when I tell you I have brought you a pup to bring up, you will be a little more than astonished."

"Me!" ejaculated grampa, "bring up a pup — I hate dogs."

"I know," said Mr. Waysmith with a reassuring nod of his head, "don't be disturbed. I will explain — I was much struck by that young girl who came to me to speak about your affair —"

He paused, and grampa said stoically, "'Tilda Jane — yes, I know."

"I have been making inquiries about her," said Mr. Waysmith, "and I want to say that I am here to-day for a purely business purpose — no philanthropy about it."

"All right," breathed grampa with inward relief.

"She has a most curious insight into animal nature," said Mr. Waysmith. "A sympathetic and strangely understanding insight. Now my dog, there, took to her at once."

"Your dog," repeated grampa, "there's no dog here, is there — 'Tilda Jane took hers with her."

Mr. Waysmith motioned to the darkest corner of the room.

"Wait till I get my specs," said grampa, and, putting them on, he, to his further amazement, discovered the dark and silent Muffles, lying close against the wall.

"I didn't see him come in," said grampa.

"Hardly anyone sees him," said the caller. "He slinks about, and lies in corners. A dissatisfied employee once entered my office with the intention of terrorizing me by means of a revolver. Muffles found him out before I did, and, when the man attempted to draw his weapon from his side pocket, the dog's teeth fastened on his wrist. The man was so overcome that he fell to the ground."

Grampa grunted in a lively way, and surveyed the dog with new respect.

"And another time, when I was in a New York hotel, my dog, who never seems to sleep, sprang on the bed and tore at the sheets. The hotel was on fire, and, with him at my heels, I had barely time to get into the street, before the building was wrapped in flames."

"Any lives lost?" asked grampa.

"Twenty," replied Mr. Waysmith, with a contraction of his forehead, "but enough of these dismal themes. I merely wished you to understand that, though hardly anyone suspects it, I take a profound interest in man's best friend, the dog. I own some kennels in Boston, and my dogs are often exhibited. Now you may know that there are fashions in dogs."

"Are there?" said grampa. "I only know one kind of dog — the yaller cur. He's always with us."

Mr. Waysmith smiled. "I go in for thoroughbreds, especially the small, or toy kind. You see that dog Muffles, though well-bred, is small for his breed. There have been fashions in black and tan toy terriers, pug dogs, fox-terriers, bull terriers, Spitz dogs, all kinds of terriers — I won't enumerate every variety, but a time has come for a new breed, and I think we have started it in Boston."

"I didn't know you were sporty," remarked grampa.

Mr. Waysmith at first frowned, then smiled broadly. "I am not sporty, Dillson, but you know

every man likes some interest apart from his work. You have little idea, when my business is over, how absorbed I become in different dog combinations. You know, to obtain new forms there must be different crosses, often in-breeding."

"Don't know the terms," said grampa, shaking his head, "but go on, sir, I'm pleased to hear you talk."

Pleased and flattered — Mr. Waysmith saw that, and, with a glow at his heart, in consequence of giving the old man pleasure, he went on, "We have, I think, got what we want at last, in a small dog with mostly bulldog characteristics. But here is my trouble. The men and boys who have to do with the raising of the pups are usually coarse-grained fellows. I have tried to get women or girls to undertake the up-bringing of the young dogs, but, while they have sympathy, they have not knowledge. They don't care for dogs as men do. Now it occurred to me that this young girl, 'Tilda Jane, who has such an understanding of dog character, might successfully raise one of our new puppies, and I have brought one of the finest."

"If you tell her to raise him, she'll do it," said grampa agreeably.

"I would rather not have my name mentioned in connection with the animal. If she knows the dog is for me, she will be unduly exercised about it, and

she is only a young girl. I don't want her worried."

"Are they worth much?" asked grampa, "when they are brought up."

Mr. Waysmith smiled, and, with his eyes on the old man's face, said, "I value that fellow there under the stove at one thousand dollars."

Grampa almost fell out of his chair. "A pup," he gasped, "Coronation! I never heard of such a thing. Let's have a look at him, sir."

Mr. Waysmith laughed irrepressibly. "Remember, Dillson, he is to be one of the founders of a race," then taking up the basket, he lifted out a soft, pale blue woollen shawl, and exhibited a dark brindled pup, about eight weeks old.

Grampa settled his glasses more firmly on his nose, and stared with eyes and mouth wide open.

"I want it to be your pup, Dillson," said Mr. Waysmith, kindly. "You give it to the little girl to bring up — you can say a friend left it with you. Then when it is a healthy young dog, I will relieve you of the care of it."

"Suppose it dies?" asked grampa, true to his habit of usually looking on the dark side of things.

"Not a word will be said, except of thanks to you for attention given it. The animal comes of delicate stock. I daresay he may die, but I shall be

very happy if he lives, and will reward you handsomely for your trouble."

"'Tilda Jane will do the work," said Grampa hastily.

"Certainly, I understand that, but I consider you as a family. The pup may be mischievous about the house."

"As a boy, I kept dogs," said grampa, "they used to chew up everything in sight."

Mr. Waysmith's face darkened. "I was born with a love for animals, but was never allowed to keep a dog. Possibly, that is the reason I am so much interested in them at the present time. Now, I must go. I am glad I happened to find you alone. May I leave the pup?"

Grampa did not hesitate an instant. "You may, sir," he said with dignity, "and I'll tell the young girl under my care to do her best for him. I'll not inform her of his value. 'Twould bow her down with care. She'll be just as good to him, thinking he's a cur."

"Thank you, Dillson," said Mr. Waysmith simply.

"I'm happy to oblige you, sir," said grampa, "and kindly take away that fine basket, and this fol-de-rol," he said, pushing the pale blue shawl with his crutch. "Looks too much like a thousand dollar dog. Put the creature in my chair. I'll get an old shirt to wrap him in."

Mr. Waysmith, with fingers that were tender in their touch, lifted the pup to grampa's warmly padded, but certainly not elegant chair, then, with a backward look at the sleeping creature, went slowly toward the front door. "I wish I had someone in my own house to look after him," he murmured to himself, "but there's no one there that would be bothered with the little fellow — I will send you a book about dogs, Dillson," he said aloud, "the little girl has native good sense, but she might as well learn something about scientific management."

"Don't send it, sir. Leave it at Johnson's book store, and I will call."

"Can you walk now?" asked the merchant in surprise.

"Yes, sir, when there's no ice on the sidewalks, but I mostly drive. Hank's got a horse now."

"I am glad to hear that," said Mr. Waysmith heartily, "and I am also glad to find you looking so much better than when I was here last."

Grampa stared painfully at him, but there was no significance in Mr. Waysmith's glance, and the old man stood contentedly in the doorway, and watched him going down the street. He hoped that his caller would meet none of the family. What a surprise he had for them, and he chuckled to himself. 'Tilda Jane would probably go into hysterics, and he hobbled back to the kitchen.

CHAPTER X

THE MONEYED PUP

STRANGE to say, the thing could not have been more dramatically arranged if grampa had had the planning of it himself. 'Tilda Jane, Perletta and Hank entered the kitchen at the same time. Hank by the front door, 'Tilda Jane and Perletta by the back one.

The little girl burst into excuses. She was so sorry to have been so long. Just as she went next door, one of Mrs. Melançon's children had pulled over a pot full of boiling water, and had scalded himself. So she had been obliged to help the mother with the little sufferer.

There she paused open-mouthed. What was that lying on grampa's chair?

"Hank!" she cried, "are my eyes playing me a trick, or do I see the truth?"

The young man, who was putting sundry parcels from his arms to the kitchen table, turned suddenly round, his own eyes following the direction of the pointing finger.

Perletta, who was hanging her coat and hat on a hook behind the woodhouse door, stepped back to the kitchen with a phlegmatic, "What a screech! I thought the house was on fire."

"Well, I be switched!" ejaculated Hank, "if there ain't a pup in my old dad's chair — the last place I'd look to see one," and he glanced at his father who stood leaning on his crutches, surveying his family, and the pup by turns.

"Father!" exclaimed Hank, "whose dog is that?"

"Mine," said the old man.

"Darling, darling," choked 'Tilda Jane excitedly, and, picking up the small, sleepy creature, she cuddled it in her arms.

"Where did you get it?" pursued Hank.

"Friend brought it to me," said his father.

"Do you calculate to bring it up?"

"Yes, with her help," said grampa, nodding toward 'Tilda Jane.

"Let's have a look at it," said Hank, taking it from 'Tilda Jane's affectionate embrace.

Hank's fingers were not ungentle, but grampa called warningly, "Take care — I don't want that pup hurt."

"Pup hurt — " repeated Hank stupidly, "you — father."

"He's lost his senses," remarked grampa in an aside, "can't talk straight."

Hank heard him and fired up. "Yes I can talk straight, sir, and I'll say what I'm thinking. What, in the name of all four-legged creatures, has possessed you, who used to hurl your crutches at dogs, to take a pup to bring up? I'd have said you'd bounce it out the window."

Grampa scarcely listened to him. His eyes were on the pup. "You're mauling him," he said. "Young men don't know how to handle dogs. Give him back to the girl," and he pointed to 'Tilda Jane, who was only too delighted to receive the tiny new member of their family.

"Come here, boys," she said, seating herself in her own little rocking-chair, and addressing Poacher and Gippie. "Come see your new brother."

The two older dogs approached. Poacher looked foolish, and slunk away. He did not want to have anything to do with the newcomer. Gippie sniffed at him in an unamiable fashion, and then went to lie under the stove. The pup was not old enough yet for them to be jealous of him.

Hank's amazement was very amusing, but no one perceived it, for everybody was too much taken up with the puppy. Finally he approached 'Tilda Jane, and asked humbly, if she would let him see what kind of a looking dog it was.

The pup had got over his sleepy fit, and was rolling about the little girl's lap, playing with her fingers.

"My stars!" exclaimed Hank, "what a cur. Head like a block, and a snub nose. Why didn't you get a good dog, while you were about it, dad?"

At this expression of opinion, the old man burst into such irrepressible and prolonged laughter that the young persons were alarmed. Hank's wildly rolling eyes tried in vain to become normal, and he endeavoured to check his father's mirth. "Never mind, dad," he said soothingly, "I guess he's all right. If you want a pup, you shall have a pup. We'll bring him up for you."

"He thinks I've gone crazy," muttered the old man, sinking into his chair, and wiping his eyes with his coloured handkerchief. "Lack-a-daisy! I never knew what a simpleton Hank was. Doesn't know a thousand dollar dog from a mongrel."

Perletta, seeing that Hank, the only person in the house of whom she stood in awe, was fully occupied with his father, bent over the pup, and exclaimed, "He favours a cow we used to have. Old Brindle we called her. She had a white streak down her nose, too. Ain't he cute?" and she held out a hand to the dog.

He turned his little, dark face up to her. There was something elfish and wicked in his hard brown

eyes, and, before she knew what he was about, he had given her a good sharp bite.

"Ow, wow!" she ejaculated, "his teeth be like needles, and he so weeny too."

Grampa turned round. "Keep your fingers away, if you don't want to get bitten."

Hank opened the door of the kitchen staircase, and put his foot on the lowest step. "The old man's in his second childhood," he muttered. "I expect we'll have some fun with him. That pup's going to rule the house. I've noticed a change in poor dad the last few days. He's turned plumb round. Used to be so ugly, and now he's pleasant. Used to sit with his mouth shut, and now he opens it, and talks. He's going to drop off soon, I fear," and Hank hung his head in real concern, as he went to his bedroom to change his street clothes for old ones.

Down in the kitchen grampa was saying to 'Tilda Jane, "Give pup food — young things eat often."

"What shall I give him, sir?" the little girl asked ecstatically.

Grampa began to speak, then he hedged. He really knew no more about the up-bringing of dogs than of elephants. "Give the usual thing," he said grandly, "and plenty of it."

"That will be bread and milk, I suppose, with a little sugar," replied 'Tilda Jane.

"Put some water in the milk," interposed Perletta, "hot water to warm it. I've heard say cow's milk ain't too strong for pups, but, owing to the change from mother's milk, you water it."

"That's common sense," said grampa critically. "Now don't scrimp him," he added, as 'Tilda Jane put down a bowl full of supper for the puppy.

"Don't scrimp him," drawled Perletta, aggravatingly, and with her usual lack of respect. "By the time your pup gets round that bowl full his sides will stick out like a barrel, an' he'll likely have a conniption fit."

"Take half away — take half away," cried grampa, and he surveyed in alarm the plump, little creature, who stood with legs braced far apart and his brindled head in the bowl.

The pup bit 'Tilda Jane, and protested vigorously, but grampa was inexorable, and waved half the contents of the bowl away.

"Put it out of his sight, girl, put it out of his sight. Don't tantalize the creature."

'Tilda Jane threw him a wondering glance. What had come over grampa? Poacher and Gippie might stuff themselves to death before his eyes, and he would not show a sign of emotion. Truly, this pup had wrought a wonderful change in the old man.

"Grampa," she said coaxingly, "who was the friend that gave you this little dog?"

"A good friend," replied grampa promptly, and with a look that was a command to ask no further questions.

"Don't let him go under the stove with those cannibals," he suddenly shouted in great excitement. "They'll gobble him up. Give him to me."

"Poacher and Gippie would not hurt him, grampa," remarked 'Tilda Jane reproachfully, as she put the pup on the old man's knee. "Big dogs don't hurt tiny pups. They just look silly at them."

"He won't set on them bare knees," said Perletta slowly, "he ain't comfy. He wants a chair to his own self."

"Get him one," said grampa, "one with a cushion and sides, so he can't fall out."

"There isn't one here," said 'Tilda Jane, looking about.

"There ain't one short of the parlour," remarked Perletta, "there's a red plush there that would be fine for a dog."

'Tilda Jane gave her a rebuking glance, but grampa at once fell in with her suggestion. "Get it," he said with a wave of his hand, "and quickly. He's biting my knee bones."

Perletta went in a lumbering way to the parlour, and came back again proudly bearing aloft, a big, fiery, red plush arm-chair that had been bought to enliven its sombre, haircloth companions.

"Put an old blanket on it," said grampa, "and cover him up. His teeth are wicked."

"It's main hot to cover him, sir," said Perletta ingratiatingly. "I'll fold the blanket and let him set on it, like a little man."

"All right," said grampa.

'Tilda Jane gave the pup an affectionate glance, and the chair a disapproving one. She adored dogs, but she did not believe in letting them rule the household. Perletta, on the contrary, had a strong unreasoning love for animals, and treated them as foolish mothers treat their spoiled offspring.

"Now we had better get the supper," said 'Tilda Jane to Perletta. "Mr. Hank will soon be coming down. You set the table, and I'll fry the sausages."

The big girl and the little girl bustled about the kitchen and dining-room, and grampa, with a red face, sat in his chair, one protecting arm thrown round his troublesome pet. The pup wriggled and squirmed, and finally, being on the point of falling, caused grampa to cry in alarm, "The smell of meat is driving him crazy. Give him a bit."

"What!" cried 'Tilda Jane and Perletta in unison, "meat for a pup!"

Grampa quailed. "He's a fighter, I guess," he said weakly, "but just as you think. I wouldn't hurt him."

"He's only a baby, grampa," said 'Tilda Jane.

" You don't give babies meat. Here — let me take him. So, so good doggie, lie down and go seepy. He wants to play, does he — well, 'Tilda will play with him," and, going to a drawer, she took out a piece of soft cotton cloth, and began to draw it over the kitchen floor.

The pup was in an ecstasy. Bracing his tiny paws, he growled and hung on, and allowed himself to be swung to and fro, until grampa exclaimed wonderingly, " He's a hold-fast and a gripper. Seems well and strong too. Hope he'll keep so."

The poor old man's face was puckered with anxiety. Ever since 'Tilda Jane came, he had had no cares, no troubles, except the one of years' standing, lately providentially removed. Now he had something to think about. From the very bottom of his heart he wished to raise this dog for Mr. Waysmith. It would be a slight return to make for his kindness to him, " and yet I don't know about it's being slight," muttered grampa, wiping the perspiration from his face, " judging by the way it's begun, 'twill be a sore task — How soon do pups grow up, Hank? " he asked, addressing his son, who at that moment entered the kitchen, and stood gazing in surprised disapproval at the red plush chair.

" That chair I slaved to get money for," the young man was saying under his breath, " made into

a hack for a cur — Oh! I don't know, father," he said aloud. "I guess a dog is well grown at a year, though I once heard a dog-fancier say that most dogs don't get to the pink of perfection till they are three years old."

Grampa groaned, and Hank said keenly, "Does it seem long to wait?"

"No, certainly not — none too long. Pups should have time to grow, just like boys."

"Yes, sir," remarked the young man resignedly, then he added, "Supper is ready. I suppose the new addition to the family will go into the dining-room with us."

"Of course he will," said grampa, taking his suggestion literally, and the semi-disgusted Hank had the pleasure of lifting the pup and his red plush throne in beside grampa's seat.

"I'd not leave him out here with her," said grampa with a disdainful nod in the direction of Perletta, who had gone into the wood-house. "She's got too little sense."

'Tilda Jane thought this rather ungrateful in grampa, when he had so recently been adopting Perletta's suggestions with regard to the pup; however she said nothing, and generously reflected that it was such a blessing to have grampa interested in some animal that they must not mind even if he were a trifle queer.

The pup fortunately dropped off to sleep while they were at their meal, and grampa at last looked at him uneasily. "Seems to me he naps a good deal. I hope he isn't sick."

"Pups always sleep a lot, grampa," said 'Tilda Jane, "like babies, you know. They just nap, and romp and eat by spells."

Grampa looked relieved, and, as the pup slept the most of the evening, his care of him was only nominal. When bedtime came, 'Tilda Jane said, "Shall I make up a little sleeping-place beside the other dogs for puppy?"

Grampa stared at her with eyes wide open with alarm.

"Or I can take him upstairs with me," she said, "I'd love to."

"You're young, and want your rest," said grampa, "put his chair beside my bed, and a lunch on the shelf by the bed-head for him. Young things like to eat in the night."

"Are you going to take him right in bed with you, grampa?" asked 'Tilda Jane timidly.

"Oh! no," said the old man with a slight shiver. "Put his chair close to me, though, where I can reach out a hand, and feel if he's warm."

The little girl made a convulsive sound in her throat, and said, "Excuse me, grampa, I want to go out in the wood-house to get a couple of apples

to take upstairs. I'll see to puppy when I come in."

Five minutes later Hank found her leaning against the apple barrel, her handkerchief pressed to her face, and happy tears rolling down her cheeks.

"What's the matter, young one?" he said bluntly.

She lowered her handkerchief. "Hank, I'm most dead laughing. To think of dear old grampa sleeping with a pup — why, that little fellow will be in his bed before five minutes are over."

'Tilda Jane was right. Hank, who did not laugh, for he was really concerned about his father, crept downstairs several times through the night to see how matters were progressing. At ten P. M. he found his father putting up a brave fight to keep the little dog out of his bed, and on his plush chair. At ten-thirty grampa had succumbed, and the pup was lying with his dark mischievous head tucked close to the old man's neck. At one A. M. there were sounds of a conflict, as Hank went cautiously down the staircase. The pup had waked up, and was insisting on having a game of romps with the sleepy old man.

"You won't lie down, will you," the unfortunate grampa was exclaiming. "If I had a stick here, I'd beat ye. Lie down, I say — lie down — Well, play then," he said, at last, in a tone of sheer exhaustion. "That's right, worry the sheet. Sic 'em,

good dog. 'Tilda Jane has nothing to do but sew up after you. It's good you're a moneyed dog, and can afford it."

"A moneyed dog," mused Hank as he crawled back to his own bed. "What does old dad mean?"

CHAPTER XI

MORE ABOUT THE PUP

It was Saturday morning, two weeks later, and 'Tilda Jane and Perletta were exceedingly busy with the baking for Sunday. The little girl went to school every day now, and, when Saturday came, she had a particularly occupied time.

While she and the big girl made pies and cakes, grampa and the pup sat in two chairs side by side. The little dog was growing famously, and had become as settled in his daily routine as any member of the family. He slept on grampa's bed at his feet. The old man had, with much difficulty, broken him of his tiresome habit of playing in the middle of the night, and of waking him by tugging at his white hair in the morning. Now, puppy had his playthings on the bed — his rubber doll, his beef bones washed clean of all particles of meat, and his ball. If he woke in the morning before his guardian did, he was obliged to play by himself.

When grampa got up, and began to dress slowly and painfully, on account of his lameness, a hilarious time came for the pup. He would cunningly

watch grampa till his woollen sock was half on his stiff foot, then, presto! away went the sock under the bed in puppy's mouth.

"Come here, good dog," grampa would say, pleadingly, and puppy, in return, would give an aggravating and extremely youthful bark. Finding that persuasion was of no avail, grampa would seize one of his crutches, and strike it sharply on the floor, "Bad dog!"

This always amused the pup excessively. That old man had never struck him, and never would, and, seizing the sock with a firmer grip, he would dash round and round the room until grampa's head was dizzy.

As a last resort, grampa would go to a box on the table, lift the cover, and take out a morsel of puppy biscuit. Cunningly holding it in one hand, he would endeavour to snatch the sock, as puppy came near. However, in time, the clever little dog became such an adept in retaining the sock, and obtaining the biscuit, that grampa was obliged to have recourse to other devices.

Every article of clothing was put on under difficulties. Puppy ran off with his shoes, hung on his coat tails, gnawed his trousers legs, and yet, to the amazement of his family, grampa, with the utmost patience, permitted this gradual deterioration of his wardrobe.

One of Hank's duties was to go down on his hands and knees every night of his life, and draw out, from under grampa's bed, the various articles secreted there during the day by the mischievous pup.

His reflections, as he did so, were often entertaining in the extreme. This Saturday morning he had been obliged to attend to this duty, neglected the night before, and he was just piling the recovered articles on the bed, talking to himself as he did so, greatly to the amusement of 'Tilda Jane and Perletta, who heard him through the open door.

"There!" he ejaculated, after another sweep under the bed with a broom, "here comes somebody's thimble, all bent on one side like a battered hat. You wouldn't think that pup had so much power in his jaws."

"I missed my silver thimble two days agone," cried Perletta with a kind of screech, "one that was guv me — you don't mean to say he laid paws on that?"

"Looks like it," said Hank, grimly, and he put in her hand the chewed piece of silver.

"Hush, girl!" exclaimed grampa, when she burst into howls of dismay, "how much was the thing worth?"

"A pedlar guv it me for buyin' other stuff. He

said it was wuth fifty cents — oh, my sweet silver thimble!"

Grampa drew out his purse. "Here's a dollar," he said, grandly, "go buy yourself two."

Perletta's lamentations ceased as suddenly as they had begun, and Hank, with a red face, made another dive under the bed.

"Seems to me this looks like my turn," he said, drily. "Two men's gloves — good dogskin — one thumb chewed off, and three fingers. Now when, in the name of common sense, did that young sarpint nab those? He ain't allowed upstairs now, is he?"

"No," said 'Tilda Jane, soberly, "but the naughty little thing sneaks up whenever our backs are turned. I think grampa ought to have a small switch for him."

"Don't you lay a finger on that dog," said grampa, hastily, and he put a protecting hand over the wicked, little head with the rolling eyes, sleepily upturned to him. "He'll improve when he's older. How much are your gloves worth, Hank?"

"Two dollars," said the young man.

"Come here," said his father, again taking out his purse. "There —"

"Five dollars," said Hank, gravely, but with a wink at 'Tilda Jane. "I owe you three dollars, sir," and he brought out his own purse.

"Next," said Hank, leaving the kitchen, and once more going down on his knees by the bed. "Two dark green neckties, pretty well masticated. I guess they're yours, sir."

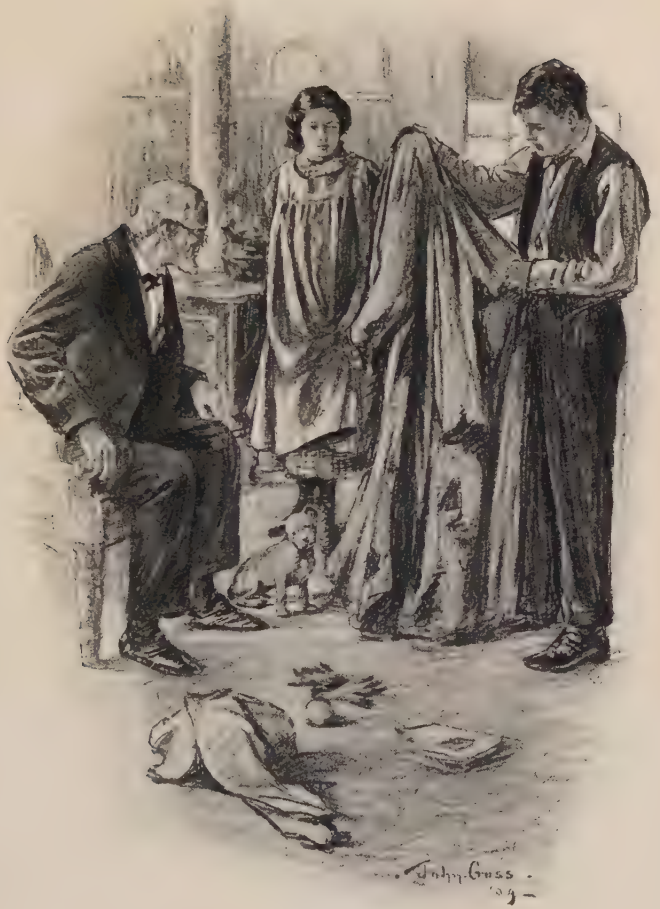
"Let that pass," said the old man with a wave of his hand. "I don't care."

"Seems to me puppy's been neglecting you, 'Tilda Jane," remarked Hank. "Here's something coming," and he cautiously drew the broom toward him. "My, what a mess. Nutmegs chewed considerable, one apple half eaten, a piece of pie — why, he's setting up a lunch counter under your bed, father — some rags — "

"My new cup towels," exclaimed 'Tilda Jane, in distress, "torn to ribbons, and I only hemmed them night before last."

"A book," continued Hank with an unmoved face. "Desperation! if it ain't my library book. I'll be fined for that. Six leaves gone at the first — middle missing, and no end — and a heap of paper in the southwest corner of the bed valance. If this is retail work, what will that pup be when he goes into business wholesale?"

"Grampa, can't I get a little switch," asked 'Tilda Jane pleadingly, "a nice little switch — a tender one? Just to let him know he can't take everything under your bed."



"'I GUESS YOU'D BETTER GET THE SWITCH, SISSY.'"

"If you won't strike him hard," said grampa, moved despite himself by this list of frailties on the part of his pet. "I don't want his spirit broken."

"I'll scarcely whip him at all," said 'Tilda Jane, kindly. "I'll whip the table leg, and myself too a little, and talk cross to him. I can make him cry and whine, just as easy, and feel he's a bad dog."

"And last but not least," said Hank, solemnly, "a great big roll of something in a corner — the new gown I bought for you, father, by all that's filial — tassels chewed off, and a big V out of the skirt."

As he spoke, he rose, and tragically held out the red, flowered gown.

Grampa stared at it, then he turned to 'Tilda Jane, "I guess you'd better get the switch, sissy — a slender one, quite slender, but get it — it ain't fair to give you so much sewing."

"Well, I'm off for the mill," exclaimed Hank, rising and brushing off his knees. "The very first chance I get, I'll drive in a lot of hooks round the walls, so you can hang things up out of that pup's way. If I don't, and he keeps on at this rate, by the time he's six months old, we'll be as destitute of clothes as the Go-Without-'Ems in Central Africa — Now dad, mind this is a half holiday,

being Saturday. I'm going to keep you all the afternoon in the sunshine. It's just the day for a sleighride."

"All right," said grampa agreeably, and Hank hurried from the house.

Grampa's eyes turned to the puppy. He had just dropped off to sleep, and in a short time would wake up. Eat, sleep and play, that summed up his life. He was a terrible care, yet grampa looked at him with a certain satisfaction.

"He's getting to enjoy dog company," Hank often used to say to 'Tilda Jane, "and it shows that no sane person can be happy without responsibility, if it's only a pup."

Another cause of gratitude Grampa had, in spite of the pup's bad actions, was that he had certainly benefited the rheumatism that used to torture the old man especially at night.

"It's the gentle warmth of the dog sleeping on your feet," said Hank. "You never did have half enough clothes on you at night, and you wouldn't coddle yourself with hot water bottles, as some old folks do."

Perletta, the irrepressible, whenever the subject came up, had a long string of stories to relate about persons in her part of the country who had been cured of sciatica and rheumatism, by sleeping with dogs and cats.

'Tilda Jane tried to listen patiently to her stories, for no one else liked the poor girl. Perletta was undoubtedly peculiar — she was rude, awkward, foolish and forward, and she went about with a dissatisfied frown on her face, except at such times when she indulged in silly good humour, or in cunning attempts to draw attention to herself.

She was terribly jealous of 'Tilda Jane who was a general favourite. "I be an orphan, too," she used to say, gloomily, "yet 'Tilda Jane, she gits all the soft words."

"'Cause she's got sense," Hank would remark pitilessly, "and you haven't."

"Well, why ain't I got it? 'Pears to me I have," and then, if he were in the humour, they would enter upon a long argument on the subject.

On this particular morning, she had kept asking 'Tilda Jane if she did not hear a voice in the air, calling, "Perletta! Perletta! Perletta!"

"No," said 'Tilda Jane, soberly, "I hear nothing but the tea-kettle singing."

"There's something calling me three times by spells," persisted Perletta. "I wonder what it's a sign of?"

"It's a sign that you're not making that apple parer work quick enough," said 'Tilda Jane. "I shall have my pie crust ready, long before the apples are sliced."

" 'Tilda," said grampa suddenly. " 'Tilda, get me my dog book."

The little girl reached to a shelf behind her and handed him a handsome volume with the picture of a dog on the cover. Grampa opened the book and began to read to himself in a low voice as he often did.

" ' Until a young dog is matured, he must be a source of anxiety to one who knows the risks. During this age of growth and development, there are, however, times of greater danger, or critical periods. These are when being weaned, when getting the permanent teeth, and between these two periods chiefly, or to put it otherwise, till the puppy is eight or nine months old.' "

Grampa sighed and turned over the leaf. " ' The most important factor of all in the environment is the individual who undertakes the work of rearing puppies. If he lacks intelligence and sympathetic feeling with dogs, by which alone they can be comprehended, it is idle to hope that any directions will be of avail.' "

Grampa reached out a hand, and patted the sleeping head. " Nearly eighty, and I never knew that before." Then he continued his reading: " ' A litter that with the same general management will grow up to the highest perfection they are capable of

under one man, will be miserable culls under another who neglects details of adaptation.' "

" Litter," exclaimed grampa, breaking off suddenly, " that means a lot. Thank fortune, I've only one," and he gave a slight shudder at the thought of a number of pups, equally destructive, equally troublesome, ranging through his small house.

" 'Tilda Jane," he said, after a few minutes, when he was obliged to put his book aside to prevent the aroused pup from chewing it. " This dog is getting too much soft food. He's got to have more crusts and crackers."

" Very well, grampa," she said agreeably.

" And some meat," continued the old man. " I've just been reading that all puppies, after eight weeks, require a little meat, for dogs are flesh-eaters."

" I'll mince some fine for him at dinner time, grampa."

" And the book says thoroughbred dogs should not go in the street before six months of age, lest they get distemper from other dogs."

'Tilda Jane raised her flushed face from the oven door that she was just closing on the completed pies.

" That's so, grampa, but I guess it don't matter for curs like your dog and mine."

" That don't sound like you, sissy," he said severely; " ain't curs as good as race dogs? "

"Oh yes, sir, I didn't mean that," she said, anxiously, "I just meant I didn't want to keep the curs from having fun. I think that pup ought to go out some of these sunny days — I mean for walks. Of course, I've always exercised him in the yard, but he wants something more, now he's growing so fast."

"But he's got a cold in his throat," said grampa, "he rattles in his sleep."

"I hope he don't keep you awake," said the little girl.

"Never mind about me," replied grampa, hastily. "Talk about the dog. I was figuring that, if the creature went with his bare feet in the snow and ice, it would give him more cold."

"That dog wants onion sass," interposed Perletta, suddenly, "onions stewed, with lemon juice dropped in after. That'll cure the rattling."

Grampa's face was quite concerned. "I gave him some sweet oil," he said, "he gobbles it right up, but the book says you mustn't dose puppies too much."

"He'll get stronger as he grows older," said 'Tilda Jane consolingly, "nobody could take better care of him than you do, grampa, for you never let him get too hot or too cold, and he is scarcely out of your sight, which is the right way to raise

good dogs and good babies. You've got to watch the little creatures."

"That's reasonable," said grampa, "and now about his going out. How would driving do?"

"Just the thing," said 'Tilda Jane, clapping her hands. "You could wrap him all up, but his cunning little head."

"Make him a little coat," said grampa, "make it right away."

"I did think of making a pudding for dinner," said 'Tilda Jane, "but —"

"Let the pudding go — let it go. We'll eat bread and butter," said grampa. "Where's your cloth? Get her work-basket, Perletta."

"I think Perletta had better go on stoning those raisins," said 'Tilda Jane. "I can manage the coat by myself."

Grampa, who was always in a great hurry where the pup was concerned, glanced at the clock. "It's ten already, soon it will be eleven, and then we're close on dinner time. You'd better make haste. You can run the thing up on the sewing-machine Hank bought you. I'll want the dog to wear it this afternoon."

'Tilda Jane got a roll of black broadcloth that had been left from grampa's new Sunday suit.

"Now," she said, "we must fit, doggie. You hold him up, grampa."

CHAPTER XII

GRAMPA'S DRIVE

THE old man took hold of the soft, wriggling creature beside him, and tried to balance him on his knees. In vain; puppy doubled his legs under him, opened his mouth, bit at everything within reach, turned and twisted, till grampa in perplexity called out, "He's all gristle — I don't believe there's a bone in his body. Get a table or something to prop him on."

Perletta, only too happy to leave her work to fuss with animals, propelled herself leisurely into the front of the house, and brought out a little table from the parlour. Grampa put the puppy on it, and Perletta held his legs while 'Tilda Jane, with scissors and paper, cut out a pattern of a little coat.

"Make it come well over his chest," said grampa, "remember his weak throat."

"He won't stand up, sir," said 'Tilda Jane anxiously, "he's made up his mind to lie down."

"I never seed a pup so sot in his ways," remarked Perletta, solemnly.

In a few minutes, they were all exhausted. The two girls had fallen into helpless laughter at the pup's antics. Grampa, only, was grim and determined, and, spurred on by him, 'Tilda Jane at last controlled herself sufficiently to cut out something that had the semblance of a coat.

"Now lay it on the cloth," exclaimed grampa, releasing the little creature who spun round and round the kitchen like a top, "cut it out — large and generous."

"It's too black," he said, when 'Tilda Jane at last held up the tiny garment. "Looks as if he was in mourning. Put on something bright."

"Some red braid would be real cute," said 'Tilda Jane, "but we haven't any in the house."

"Go down town," said grampa, "buy plenty, don't cut him short."

'Tilda Jane glanced at the clock, then at the big kitchen table, littered with preparations for more cooking. "Saturday morning is a busy time," she said.

Grampa began to dance one of his crutches up and down on the floor — a sign of great mental disturbance. "Do you want that pup to die — I tell you, he can't go to drive with his chest uncovered."

'Tilda Jane glanced at him anxiously, then she said, "Grampa dear, don't you worry — I'll start

right off," and, after a few hurried directions to Perletta, she scurried down the street in the direction of the shops.

By dinner time the coat was stitched, trimmed and buttoned on the pup, and, as Hank came in the front door, the final trying on was in process.

He burst into a great guffaw of laughter, "Hey, doggie, you look like a king."

The pup, always excited by Hank's goodnatured, jovial voice, made a bound, broke from his attendants, and dashed round and round the kitchen, under the stove, the table, and chairs, his eyes wild and wicked, his wide mouth open, his pink tongue hanging.

Hank gave a loud whoop every time he passed him, "Hi! little demon, go it — hurrah for the black and red!"

"Catch him, catch him," called grampa in distress, "he'll roast alive in that thick coat in this hot kitchen — he'll have a coughing spell."

"That's so," shouted Hank agreeably, "don't fret, sir, we'll corner him. 'Tilda Jane, look out for that hurdle there. Perletta, stand by the stone wall," and he indicated the old-fashioned fireplace where the stove sat. After many false dives and swoopings after the nimble little fellow, and after Perletta had broken two plates and a pitcher in

her wild plunges, puppy was secured, his coat unbuttoned, and he laid panting and exhausted across grampa's knees.

"Some cold water for him," commanded the old man. "He's hot — he's on fire."

"Hold on a bit, father," said Hank, consolingly, "he'll cool down. Play has to go on in the world, and pups and children, and other young creatures, are made to carry on that very thing."

"You keep your eye off him," replied grampa, decidedly. "You put the mischief in him."

"Your slave, sir," said Hank, obediently, and, during dinner time, he did not once glance at the still mischievous animal, who, in vain, tried to attract his attention.

"Now, sir," said Hank, when the dinner was over. "All on board for the sleigh ride."

"Yes, yes," said grampa, getting up from his chair. "'Tilda Jane, come put on my snow boots."

"Yes, grampa, I'm just warming them under the stove," said the little girl, "and here's your big overcoat. I brought it in from the front hall to take the chill off."

Twenty minutes later, the beautiful Milkweed stood by the back door, thoughtfully pawing the snow with one slender hoof, while 'Tilda Jane and Perletta assisted grampa into the sleigh.

"Tuck the hot water can well under his feet,

Perletta," said 'Tilda Jane, "and give me that hot water bag, please."

"What's that — what's that?" asked grampa, suspiciously, as the little girl thrust something soft on his knees. "I ain't a woman. I shan't carry a muff."

"I've seen a picture of the Emperor of Germany carrying a muff when he was going hunting," said Hank, "and I guess 'Tilda Jane thinks you are getting so tony now with a horse, and a dog, and new clothes, that you'll want to shine up to his Germanship."

"It isn't a muff, grampa," said 'Tilda Jane soothingly, "it's a hot water bag wrapped in a shawl."

"What does the girl take me for?" asked grampa in pretended discontent. "I ain't as old and feeble as she thinks."

"No grampa, but we don't want you to get so. Besides, the hot bag will be just the thing for the pup. See how he curls up on it."

"You may leave it then," said the old man. "I'm much obliged. Get out yourself, 'Tilda — have a walk."

"Yes, sir; yes, sir," and she waved her hand, as Hank clucked to Milkweed, and they went gaily out of the yard, and down the street, with sleigh bells dancing and ringing.

"Perletta," she said, as they turned to enter the house, "It is a lovely day. Would you like to go out?"

"I ain't got no one to go with," said Perletta in a glum voice.

"You may go with me," said 'Tilda Jane, kindly, "I have some shopping to do down town."

"Will you take me to the moving pictures?" asked the disagreeable girl, as if she were conferring a favour on 'Tilda Jane by accepting her offer.

"Yes, if I have time. We must clear up here first."

Grampa and Hank were driving down French Row. "I guess we'll go out in the country," said Hank, "the snow is just about right depth."

"Go down town," said grampa, "I want you to buy something for me."

"Down town?" said Hank, disconsolately, then he added cheerfully, "All right, sir. What do you want?"

"A hall stove."

"A hall stove," repeated Hank, and he stared at his father, and then dropped his eyes to the wide-awake pup who, with just his young head peering from the fur, was greedily drinking in the scenery on this his first drive. "I bet you it's for that pup," he said under his breath, "that moneyed pup."

His father heard him. "Partly for the pup, Hank," he said mildly, "partly for the little girl. The house is cold, and I've got a little extra money. I thought I'd spend it."

"We've always got on without one," said Hank. "'Pears to me we're snug enough. A fire in the kitchen all day, one in the dining-room evenings — "

Grampa did not bear opposition well. "You're a great, fat lout," he said with some heat. "I'm old, and my blood is thin. 'Tilda Jane ain't strong — "

"And the pup is sappy, and has a rattling in his throat," laughed Hank. "Go ahead, dad — just as you say. I'll buy two hall stoves, if you like, one for up-stairs, one for down," and, as he spoke, he turned Milkweed's head toward the centre of the town. "I guess you, and sissy, and the pup are worth a stove. I know I don't feel the cold, but I ain't selfish."

After they had dashed through one snowy street after another, and had brought up with a flourish in front of Ciscasset's leading stove store, Hank turned to his father, "Now sir, what kind of a heating-machine do you want?"

"Give me the lines," said Grampa, bringing his hands, quite warm, thanks to 'Tilda Jane's hot water bag, from beneath the fur rug. "Go you into

the store. Buy a stove. I don't care what kind. Have it put up. I pay for it."

"You've struck a gold mine, sure," said Hank with a chuckle, "however, I'll make 'em give me a good discount off — for cash," he added, as his father handed him a roll of bills, "and I'll not bother you about choosing it. Don't chafe, if I stay a spell. Milkweed will stand like a lady, unless someone throws a bomb at her."

"That ain't likely to happen here," said grampa, "still it might. I'll keep a grip of the lines. A good driver never lets them go, no matter if his animal is perfection."

Hank chuckled again, and, pushing his cap a little on one side, went into the store, feeling quite important, as he always did now, in his new rôle of a family man. "Better than being a lonely old coot a-chasing himself about the country," he said under his breath.

While grampa sat in the sleigh, trying to straighten his old back, and hold his head up, being quite well aware of the fine appearance he presented in his good coat, his warm fur cap, to say nothing of the handsome sleigh and the graceful Milkweed, his eyes lighted on someone driving swiftly down the street.

Ciscasset was fortunate in having a very wide

main street. On each side were stores, that were unusually fine for a small town, where persons were hurriedly passing in and out, intent on their Saturday shopping. The middle of the street was as lively as the sidewalks, but among all the driving sleighs, and delivery sleighs, and big teams from the country, grampa's eye rested on the smart, dark blue cutter, where a man sat alone, handling his reins in a masterly fashion.

As if hypnotized by the old man's admiring eye, the occupant of the cutter pulled up when he got near him, and guided his horse close beside Milkweed, and then a trifle past her, so that he could talk comfortably with grampa.

"Good day, sir," said the old man stiffly but agreeably.

"I am glad to see you out," said Mr. Waysmith, and he gave one comprehensive glance over the horse, the sleigh, and the neatly dressed old man.

"There's one thing, sir, you don't see," said grampa proudly, and he lifted the fur cover on his knee.

Mr. Waysmith's face lighted up strangely, and grampa lifted out the warm and cosy puppy. "He's gone to sleep, sir, gets tired easy. Youth and old age are alike in that respect."

"Let me see him, please," said the merchant, and,

reaching over, he transferred the puppy to his own knees.

The little dog, still in the first blush of youth, and having puppy confidence in all the world, woke up at this treatment, and finding himself in the hands of a stranger, fell into an ecstacy, and began to lick his gloves, and any part of his face that his pink tongue could reach.

"You'll get over that when you are older," said Mr. Waysmith under his breath, "you will be like your father Muffles, and only recognize your friends — Keep still, wriggler," he said aloud. "I want to look at you," and, slipping off the new coat, he carefully examined him, head, chest, back and legs. "He's a beauty," he said in a low, utterly contented voice, "points almost perfect. How is his health?"

"Good, except his throat," said grampa, "that's weak. Better put on his coat, sir. See, he's beginning to cough."

"That weakness will likely pass away," said Mr. Waysmith in a tone of deep satisfaction. "The first few weeks are the ticklish ones with this breed. I hope he is not a great trouble to you."

"Well," said grampa after a slight hesitation, "he's a perfect gentleman, if you let him have his own way."

"Not very different in that respect from human

beings," said Mr. Waysmith, and, though he addressed grampa, his eyes remained fixed on the small animal.

His passion for dogs was so profound that he could not conceal his intense interest in them, and in this little fellow in particular, and grampa, shrewd enough to perceive this, and being also extremely anxious to let Mr. Waysmith know that he was trying to make some return for his favours to him, said, "He's a great pet, sir. We've no child in our home. He most fills the place."

"Does he," said Mr. Waysmith in tones of great gratification. "I hope the little girl does not find him too much care."

"No sir, she sets great store by him, and never gets out of patience."

"He destroys things, I suppose."

"Well sir, I may say he does by times — no need to show up all that goes on in your house," remarked grampa stoutly, and he tried to forget the chewed-off corner of the red plush chair, and a ripped-up silk umbrella that he had noticed just before he left home.

"What do you want us to call him, sir?" he went on. "He's quite a dog — ought to have a name."

"I have not yet settled on a name for him," said Mr. Waysmith. "I will let you know later."

"Hank has been reading an Irish story to me evenings," said grampa, "and in my mind I call this fellow after the hero — Handy Andy, the wild Irishman, later in life, Lord Scatterbrain."

Mr. Waysmith smiled. "So Hank reads Samuel Lover's stories, does he? 'Rory O'More' is another. I daresay it would be a good plan to start this family of dogs with Irish names. We will call this little chap Handy Andy then — Andy for short."

"Very good, sir," and grampa tucked the shivering pup nearer the hot water bag.

"You got my check, Dillson?" asked Mr. Waysmith.

"Yes sir, it's far too much. The pup don't cost near that much. Don't send any more till I ask for it."

Mr. Waysmith smiled peculiarly, and touched his horse lightly with the whip. "Good-bye, Dillson."

"He don't like to be dictated to," muttered grampa, "best to let him alone. What he sends will in time make a snug sum for the little girl. If it hadn't been for her, I'd not be sitting here, for Hank would not have come home. She's done it all, but we mustn't spoil her — where's that boy of mine?" and he glanced through the big glass windows, where stoves of all sizes exhibited themselves in stolid rows to the gaze of passers-by.

Hank, who had struck a good bargain some time ago, had been dodging about behind the stoves, waiting for Mr. Waysmith to go away.

"All very well for him and father to eat off the same plate," he said. "If I stick my spoon in, I'll get a rap over the knuckles. Father's an old man, and I'm young, and Mr. Waysmith's understrapper. Hands off — no familiarity, etc., etc. — Well dad," he went on, drawing on his thick fur gloves as he sauntered out to the sleigh, "I guess you had a caller."

His father handed him the reins without a word.

"Did he take much stock in the pup?" asked Hank, mischievously. "The moneyed pup," he added under his breath.

Still his father did not speak, and he continued, "Mr. Waysmith don't make much of dogs by all outward signs. That bulldog of his follows him about with a tired, don't-care waddle. If Mr. Waysmith stops short, dog goes and lies down away off, and stares in the other direction, as if he didn't belong to him. But he knows what goes on better than if he was by his side, and I'm kind of suspicious of that friendship. Mr. Waysmith is a great man to pretend he's awful hard and flinty, and he ain't. I believe he likes dogs."

Grampa apparently had no opinion on the subject, for he resolutely kept his mouth shut, and

Hank threw a waggish wink in the direction of the pup, who at this instant stuck his moist young nose from under the rug. Then seeing that no information was to be extracted from his father, he turned his attention to Milkweed, and politely requested her to go up Kennebago Street instead of going home as she wished to do.

"I wish I loved business the way you love your stable," Hank said to her, and Milkweed, being a horse of a sociable and reasonable disposition, turned her head as if she really understood what he said.

"Why shouldn't a fellow talk to his horse?" her master often said. "There's more pleasure and profit in conversing with them than with some human beings, and it's lots safer. Who ever heard of a horse giving away a secret?"

Grampa remained sunk in his reverie, so Hank, who was at almost all times a fluent and continuous talker, kept on favouring Milkweed with sundry observations on the persons and turnouts they met. They were now getting toward the residence part of Ciscasset. In common with many other places, the stores were gradually advancing, eating up fine houses and gardens, and forcing the lovers of quiet and extensive grounds to move further and further from the centre of commerce. Just where houses began to alternate with stores, Hank exclaimed suddenly, "Why, there's 'Tilda Jane and Perletta,

and Poacher and Gippie — all sky-gazing, except Gippie."

Grampa stared, and saw that the other members of his family were indeed apparently gazing up into the sky.

Hank pulled Milkweed up near the sidewalk. "Well, sissy, do you see an air-ship, or has Perletta's last bit of common sense gone sailing into the blue?"

'Tilda Jane turned round with a start. "Oh! Hank, is it you? We're listening to the pigeons. There's a young one there being fed. See him follow his parents, and shake his wings."

Hank drew his cap over his eyes, and looked at the top of the tall house near them. "Sure enough," he said, "there is a young one there. Spring is coming, but it's powerful early for street pigeons to be making nests. They must be well fed."

"What is it?" asked grampa. "I'm a bit snow blind from the glare."

"It's three sooty looking pigeons," said Hank, "two old, one young, and the young one is following the old ones round that flat roof, flapping his big wings, and yelling for his supper. He's most the size of his parents, but he can't feed himself. Listen to his voice, how callow it is. There — he's getting something. No, he isn't — he's in such a hurry that he's stepped over the edge of the roof.

Now he's flying across the street to the opposite houses. You can see him now."

Yes, grampa could and did see him. "He's like a crow," he said.

"Not quite so black, dad. Bless me — he's off that roof now. I vow this is his first flight. He goes in a wobbly fashion. So so — steady," and he spoke soothingly to Milkweed, who to her surprise, suddenly found a black bird dashing by her head.

"He's astonished himself as well as you, Milkweed," said Hank, as the dark pigeon went precipitately fluttering over the snowy road, and on to the sidewalk. "Pussy willows and grimalkins! 'Tilda Jane has turned a cat-in-the-pan!"

Hank had burst into a sonorous peal of laughter, and grampa, who saw nothing amusing, fell into a nervous fit of irritability. "Hush up," he exclaimed, "you sound like a fog-horn — what's the matter, anyway? You're so big, I can't see a-past you."

"Sir," said Hank, clapping one broad hand over his mouth to check his laughter. "I just saw two cats, and one was sissy."

Grampa turned his head away, sulkily.

"Truly sir," said Hank, "'Tilda did make a leap in the air. You know, though usually she ain't a rusher, she can be quick as a flash, when the times

call for lightning — That black pigeon was kiting over the snow, and got under that yard fence. A gray cat who was sneaking, the dear only knows where, sprang on it like a tiger. 'Tilda couldn't get over the fence, but she gave a leap in the air, and hurled her shopping bag in the cat's face. Pussy ran, you may be sure, with Poacher after her, then the dog came back, crawled under the fence, seized the dazed bird in his mouth, and carried it to 'Tilda who now has it pressed to the breast of that warm brown coat you gave her — sissy, come here," he said, raising his voice.

The little girl turned, and, holding the pigeon firmly, walked toward the sleigh.

"Let's see your windfall," said Hank. "I guess it's all right — only frightened, but it can't fly straight. Shouldn't have left the roof — 'O'er all who flutter their wings and fly, a hawk is hovering in the sky,' only in this case, it was a cat."

"What shall I do with it?" asked 'Tilda Jane, anxiously, "could we get it to the top of that high building, and if we did, would it stay there?"

"Law no," said Hank, "it would likely blunder down again, and pussy would get it. Let me feel it. It's a pretty fat squab, or squeaker, now that it's left the nest. Turn your head, and I'll wring its neck and take it home. 'Twill make a tasty pie for father's Sunday dinner."

'Tilda Jane seized the pigeon, and shrank away from him in dismay.

"What! you want to keep it!" said Hank. "Well, I'll not snatch it — anything to oblige a good little girl like you. Cuddle it right up to you, and, when I get home, I'll show you how to feed it; but," he added teasingly, "don't let Perletta get it in her clutches. She looks as if she would like to eat something alive," and, with a final chuckle, he drove swiftly up the street.

"What's the matter with Perletta?" asked grampa curiously.

"When I spoke of killing the pigeon, her eyes flashed, and she doubled up her big fists as if she would smite me to the earth — the snowy earth. Didn't you hear her muttering to herself? She's half simpleton, but she's good to animals."

'Tilda Jane was trotting rapidly along the street in the opposite direction, holding the trembling bird inside her warm coat, while she murmured tenderly, "Poor little Housetop — you shan't be eaten. I will be a mother to you."

CHAPTER XIII

LITTLE HOUSETOP

"Now as to pigeons," said Hank a few hours later, in a pompous and comfortable voice, "'Tilda Jane, do you know anything about them?"

"I know they like to be fed regularly," said the little girl, reproachfully.

Hank gave an unctuous giggle. "Ho! ho! miss is huffy because I would have my own supper before I attended to pidgie's. Birds and animals have to watch while their masters feed."

"But do they like it?" she asked, keenly.

Hank shrugged his shoulders. "Not more than we do, I expect, but you know, 'Tilda, half the world has to wait, while the other half feeds, and sometimes they starve while they're waiting."

"It isn't right," she said, decidedly, "the Lord made enough to go round."

"Now you're trying to draw me into a discussion, and I ain't going to be drawn," said Hank, and he spread his arms out on the dining-room table, and

gazed goodnaturedly about him, and then particularly at the pigeon, who was sitting stolidly in a basket.

" 'Tilda Jane, get me first a newspaper."

The little girl handed him one, and he spread it carefully over the red table cloth.

" Now cut me a slice of fresh bread, and bring it to me on a plate, with some boiling water in a kettle."

" You ain't goin' to feed that bird b'ilin' water," called Perletta from the doorway, where she stood wiping a plate on a towel in a slow and dawdling manner, " not while I'm alive and fightin'."

" Especially fightin'," returned Hank, " oh, ain't she a peach! " and he shook with suppressed laughter, until slow tears formed and rolled down his cheeks.

" 'Tilda," he said, when he recovered himself, " have the water fiery — a slow boil won't do. It must be a jumping one."

" Hush, Perletta," said 'Tilda Jane, as she passed her on her way to the kitchen. " Mr. Hank wouldn't hurt that bird. He is only twitting you."

" He dassent hurt it," grumbled Perletta, still keeping a wary eye on the mischievous young man. " I'd not trust him alone with no bird nor purp. He's all right with hosses."

" Now little 'Tilda," remarked Hank, when she

came back, "what do you think I am going to make?"

"I don't know, Hank," she said.

"Well, get me a saucer full of rolled oats, the kind you use for mush, and you'll see."

'Tilda Jane ran to the pantry, and, when she came back, found Perletta in a state of desperation, alternately advancing into the dining-room, and retreating to the kitchen, for Hank sat with the little brass water kettle uplifted, as if he were going to pour some of its contents down the pigeon's throat.

"Hank!" exclaimed 'Tilda Jane rebukingly, and, becoming sober, he said, "Now sissy, watch, 'cause you'll have to do it yourself next time. See, I pour some water on the slice of bread, enough to soften it. Then I put on rolled oats, and mash them together in a sticky mess. Then I knead it with my hand — look, just as if I was making bread in the old-fashioned way. Go get me a few grains of rice to put in — Now, I am going to make pills from this dough, and your little lean paws will be better at that than my big ones. Take notice — this way — not round pills, long ones."

'Tilda Jane eagerly manipulated her part of the dough, and made several well-shaped, oblong morsels.

"That's fine," said Hank. "Now get me a shawl for pidgie."

"A shawl!" repeated 'Tilda Jane in surprise.

"Yes, a cloth, anything to go over his shoulders."

"It's pretty warm here," she said, surveying the glowing fire in the stove near them.

Hank laughed. "It isn't for heat, sissy. Do you suppose that pigeon is going to stand still and let us feed him? No, sir — he would for his father, but not for us. Perletta, give me that dish clout."

Glad of an excuse to come into the room, Perletta handed him her towel, and, folding it neatly shawl-wise, Hank bound it about the wings of the pigeon, then addressed 'Tilda Jane.

"Open his beak, sissy — not too far. Don't throw his head back. Let him stand in a natural position. Now dip the pill in water, and slip it gently back in his beak. He will take charge of its going down his throat."

"Well, well," said 'Tilda Jane, thoughtfully, "I never knew that was the way to feed pigeons. I would have tried him with a spoon."

"There's another way," said Hank, "of letting him feed through your fingers. You know old pigeons feed their young ones by pumping the food down their throats."

"Yes, I've seen them out on the barn roof," said 'Tilda Jane.

"You spread your fingers apart," continued Hank, "and the squab will often help you by gob-

bling down what you put in his beak, but this fellow is pretty old — I guess pills are better. A pity he isn't younger, if you want to keep him."

"Why, won't he get tame?" asked 'Tilda Jane.

"Not as tame as if you had him as soon as his eyes were opened."

"How did you know so much about pigeons?" asked the little girl, wonderingly.

"I once travelled along with a show of them, and I learned a lot."

"I didn't know you ever belonged to any show, but the creamery business," said 'Tilda Jane, opening her black eyes wide at him.

"I didn't, sissy. I just happened to be going from place to place at the same time as this vaudeville affair. There was a man connected with it that had tame pigeons, and, whenever he exhibited them, he brought down the house. They were as tame as kittens, and did tricks for him, and followed him wherever he went."

"How did he make them like him?" asked 'Tilda Jane.

"That was his secret, sissy. He wouldn't tell anyone, for he said, if he did, everybody would be going into the pigeon trick business, but I found out, and a simple enough thing it was."

"What was it?" she inquired, eagerly.

"I said to him one day, 'Smith, I believe your

whole trick is to get those fellows when they're young,' and then he told me it was. He went to pigeon lofts, and chose the birds he wanted, and took them out of the nest before their eyes were opened. He brought them up by hand, and they always thought he was their father."

"Even after they learned to feed themselves?"

"Yes, sissy, he always stood by them, whereas you know an ordinary pigeon throws off one brace of young ones to raise another. The pigeons stood by him, too, and it was cute to see them light all over him, and rub his face with their beaks, and look in his pockets for seeds."

"What did he give them to eat?"

"All sorts of grain and seeds. Pigeons don't eat much green stuff, unless they're obliged to. He was as fussy about their diet as you are about dad's. Nothing was too good for them, and why shouldn't he have looked after them? They brought him in a nice, tidy income."

"Pigeons are dear birds," said 'Tilda Jane, thoughtfully, "so big and plump. I am always afraid to handle little birds."

"And they're smart," said Hank. "Why, a homing pigeon is as knowing as a dog — Look out there, 'Tilda. Handy Andy is crawling off father's knee to get those pills."

"Naughty boy," said 'Tilda Jane, tapping the

mischievous, brindled paws, "stealing from a poor orphan pidgie."

Grampa, who had at first watched the feeding of the pigeon with interest, had fallen asleep. Hank gently took the pup from him, and carried him out to the kitchen, where he soon had the little creature engaged in a game of ball.

'Tilda Jane restored the pigeon to its basket, and, lavishing all sorts of blandishments on it, tried in vain to win its confidence. The pigeon sat coldly and timidly staring at her.

"No use, sissy," said Hank presently from the doorway, "wait till after you've fed it a few days."

'Tilda Jane perforce had to wait, but day by day the pigeon thawed. He could not resist the affectionate attention bestowed on him, and, at the end of a week, he would utter hoarse, appealing cries, and shake his wings whenever he saw his little owner approaching him.

"I just love little Housetop," 'Tilda Jane said enthusiastically, "but don't be jealous, dogs," she went on, addressing Poacher and Gippie who sat dumbly eloquent before her. "This birdie, slipping in a tiny corner of my heart, won't crowd you two dogs — nor the puppy," she added, as Handy Andy came dancing into the kitchen, his pink tongue out, his wicked eyes looking for mischief.

Poacher and Gippie were sensible enough not to interfere with the pigeon. Not so the wild Irish pup, Lord Scatterbrain. He sprang at it whenever he saw it, caught its tail feathers between his teeth, forcing 'Tilda Jane to keep it mostly upstairs, where puppy was supposed not to go.

On this particular evening, the pigeon, who spent a good deal of his time sitting on her shoulder, had descended to the kitchen on this his favourite perch. 'Tilda Jane was just about to go to bed. Hank had retired, and Perletta was tidying the kitchen, preparatory to ascending to her little room.

'Tilda Jane watched her as she went to and fro, picking up the pup's toys, and pushing the chairs back in their places, straightening things on the shelves, and raising the window curtains, so that the room would be light when they descended in the morning.

" She isn't slack, though she is unhandy," said the little girl to herself. " Perhaps I ought to tell her. A pat on the back makes the heart light. Perletta," she said aloud, " you're getting to be quite a housekeeper."

Perletta, who was winding the clock, gave her a peculiar look.

" You're glad you came here, aren't you? " continued 'Tilda Jane. " It's better than the asylum, isn't it? "

"Better in some ways, wuss in others," said the big girl, ungraciously.

"Would you like to go back to the asylum?" asked 'Tilda Jane.

"No," blurted the other, "back to the asylum — no."

"Would you like another place?" inquired 'Tilda Jane. "We could get you one if we tried. I know you're not happy here."

"A place — I wants a home," Perletta burst forth wrathfully, "ain't I wuth it?"

"It's a pity you can't settle down here," said the little girl with a trace of irritation in her tone. "Sometimes you act as if we were all against you."

Perletta was talking to herself, as she often did. This suited her better than giving a direct answer. "Some folks gits all the pettin' — Oh! sweetie, dearie, how spruce you be — 'cute little girlie — she run away, did she, from the wicked 'sylum. She wanted a happy home. Oh, my!" and Perletta threw back her big head, and laughed hysterically.

Perletta was having one of her queer fits, and the better way would be to leave her; but 'Tilda Jane, in spite of her two years of peace and plenty, was by no means a model young girl yet.

"You're all wrong inside," she said hastily. "The fault isn't with us, 'tis with yourself."

Perletta stared at her angrily, and, at this instant, Hank, most unfortunately, made his appearance in the stairway, a tumbler in his hand. He was in his shirtsleeves, and had been reading in his room until he became thirsty, and had descended for a glass of water.

"What's going on?" he asked, eyeing the two excited girls. "Perletta, you look mad enough to bite the stove in two."

"And she looks mad as a wet hen!" cried the big girl, pointing an accusing finger at 'Tilda Jane.

"'Tis true," said Hank, meditatively, "but I bet it's your fault. From Maine to Texas, there couldn't be a woman such a master hand at riling as you. Now you just go to bed, and leave sissy alone."

Perletta drew in her breath, then, to borrow her own expression, she began to call Hank all the abusive names she "could lay her tongue to."

At first, he was furious, and 'Tilda Jane fell into despair at having precipitated a quarrel between the two persons who usually confined themselves to brief personalities. Perletta, for once, had lost all fear of Hank, but she soon spoilt the effect of her words, by using such peculiar phraseology that Hank from rage passed to amusement, and then to ridicule.

"What's that you say?" he ejaculated, suddenly. "I'm 'womblecropt' — what in creation is that? I

thought I'd heard fellows laying for each other, but 'pon my word you out-syllable any jockey I ever listened to. Where did you get those sweet names, Stormy-Head? — Hold on, I'll make a list," and he pretended to be fumbling in his pocket for pencil and paper.

Perletta, in an overpowering, speechless rage, pawed the air wildly with her two big hands, then she rushed from the room, and 'Tilda Jane, after a few inarticulate remarks, followed her example.

" Field's clear, I can make for the water faucet," said Hank philosophically. " It's lucky I dropped on 'em when I did, or Big Girl would likely have had Little Girl's hair all clawed out — Big Girl had better leave — she's too hippopotamussy for us."

'Tilda Jane, panting breathlessly, had rushed to her room, and, pulling aside the curtain at the window, was gazing out at the starlit night. " Oh, dear! " she gasped, " I'm all tuckered out, and it's my own fault. Temper marched on ahead, and I trotted behind. Why didn't I let Perletta alone? "

She paused, and, throwing up her window, turned first one hot cheek and then the other to the cool night breeze. How many times in her careworn life had she gone to her window at night, and gazed out on a sleeping world. She did not know — poor, partially educated girl — that she had one thing in common with the best and greatest of the earth.

Dear Mother Nature could always pour balm on her wounds. Weak and frail as she was, she had a great heart, and presently she felt calmed and soothed by the beneficent influence of the night.

"Seems as if I lose Perletta when I look up at the stars," she said, in an awed voice, as she raised her little, dark face to the magnificence of the sky. "They're so awful quiet. Teacher tells me there are other worlds. Maybe there are other Perlettas in them — Oh Lord! I'm only a little girl, and I live in a little place, and I shouldn't make too much of myself, but still I'm somebody. I must do better by Perletta and try to be more loving, 'cause she craves affection. I'll try to pretend she's pretty, and has got blue eyes and curly hair. I wish she wasn't so ugly inside and out, but she can't help it — Lord bless all the world, 'cause Ciscasset is only a small bit of it. Make it nicer for the people, and the birds, and the animals, and don't let folks suffer too much. Kill them quick, oh Lord, 'cause it's the pain that counts."

She fell into a sudden and long silence, until a faint, musical, far-away sound reached her ear.

"It's Jean Melançon," she said, "coming home singing," and her black eyes tried to pierce the darkness of the night in the direction of the singer.

Soon the soft wind blowing up the river brought her the words:

"May God preserve thee, Canada,
Tho' child among the nations,
'Mid proudest lands, strong hearts and hands,
Shall claim for thee a station.

"Land of the forest and the lake,
Land of the rushing river,
Our prayers shall rise for thy dear sake,
Forever and forever."

"It's just what I said," she murmured, when the sweet, boyish voice was still. "There're other nations. Those French people don't forget their own land, and God loves us all — French people, and Americans, and English, and all the world — If only we could be better!"

She sighed, gave a long, last look at the sky, the quiet garden, and the road. She could not see the river, but she felt the soft wind blowing from it, and, whispering "The spring is coming, maybe Perletta will be happier when she can get out-doors more," she drew the curtain, and began to get ready for bed.

"It seems as if we might all be happy," she soliloquized, as she folded her garments neatly and laid them across a chair. "Grampa is — he's lying in that room downstairs, warm and cosy with that frisky pup like a baby at his feet. He's quiet in his mind now, and Hank is cheery as the day is long. His health is good, and he stands well with

the folks here. I'm happy, 'cause I've got dear old Gippie, and that sweet and lovely Poacher, and this 'cute little Housetop," and, approaching the pigeon, she allowed him to rub her cheek affectionately with his beak. "And out in the barn," she continued, "is Milkweed munching her good sound oats and hay, and Ruth Ann, the cow, chewing her cud, and the hens next door, with their scaly legs all well, and their crops sticking out with good things, and the pigeons and sparrows gone to sleep in the nice, warm winter houses Hank put up on the side of the barn for them, and we've got a hall stove, and all the house is like summer, and I can sit upstairs and sew a spell when I want to be alone with Housetop — Only Perletta is ugly, and is it our fault, or isn't it? Hank says it isn't, that she has a chip on her shoulder, and no one will ever get it away from her. Poor Perletta — she frets me. Maybe her badness is more my fault than I think," and, with a disturbed face, the little girl mechanically stroked her bird.

She thought afterwards, with a pang at her heart, how especially dear her little pigeon seemed to her that night. He had grown considerably since she got him, and, surveying his little plump body with pride, she went to her closet, and took out some of the choice, oily hemp seed that Hank had got her as a treat for him.

Little Housetop, making a low murmuring sound of gratitude, greedily swallowed the seeds as 'Tilda Jane put them in his beak, and fluttered his wings for more.

"No, no," she said gently, "but you may have a drink of water," and she took the mug from her washstand, and held it out to him.

He had learned to drink by this time, though he could not yet eat, and, dipping in his beak, he drank long and heartily, and then flew to the big cracker box filled with straw that Hank had got for him.

Even after getting into bed, it seemed as if 'Tilda Jane could not get her bird out of her mind, and once she sprang up and moved his box away from the window.

"Dear pidgie, if you took cold while I was warm in bed, I would never forgive myself," she said to him. "Sleep warm, little brother."

The bird uttered a gracious coo. He had become so fond of her that he would respond to her call any time of day or night.

'Tilda Jane soon fell asleep. Bad dreams disturbed her. She felt that she had done wrong in yielding to a fit of impatience, and this knowledge pursued her, though she slept soundly enough not to hear a heavy, stealthy footstep in her room an hour later. Poor child — her awakening would be sad, but this knowledge was mercifully kept from her.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FLIGHT OF A WILD GOOSE

HANK was a great laugher, and now that he was happy and comfortable at home, and prospering in his business, the least thing would send him off into a roar of amusement.

However, the next morning, his peals of laughter were so loud and long that they at last aroused his father who was dressing, and 'Tilda Jane who was scampering through her toilet upstairs, having overslept herself.

"That comes of talking to the stars when I ought to be sleeping," she murmured, giving a hasty brush to her hair. "Crouch down in your box little Housetop, I can't feed you till after breakfast, but you won't mind, as you had a lunch late last night."

The pigeon did not reply to her, and calling out, "Oh! you are too sleepy to talk, are you?" she sped down the stairway to the kitchen.

Hank was usually the first one up, and always started the kitchen fire, but this morning he had forgotten his work, and was rolling against the wall,

alternately turning his face to it with gasps of amusement, and then gazing at a small piece of paper he held in his hand.

"What's the matter, Hank?" inquired 'Tilda Jane a little anxiously, for he was not generally taken with these convulsions of mirth so early in the morning.

"What's wrong with you, Hank?" asked grampa at the same time, and he too surveyed his son with some anxiety, for his laughter was becoming alarming.

Hank made a mighty effort to control himself. "Hear this," he said with a catching of his breath, "hear this document left on the kitchen table," and he read convulsively, "Gurrls can turrn as well as wurrms. I rrun to rreach a happpy Homme."

Grampa listened in a mystified silence, but 'Tilda Jane, with a flash of intuition, clasped her hands in distress, and, looking searchingly round the room, exclaimed, "Where's Perletta?"

"Rrunning to rreach a happpy Homme," replied Hank with a burr in his voice.

"She's run away," cried the little girl, "Oh dear! — what shall we do — what shall we do?"

The concentrated pain and concern in her tones so attracted Hank's attention that he partially sobered himself. "Never mind, sissy. Her whole body isn't worth one groan from you."

"And I tried to make her happy," ejaculated 'Tilda Jane, "and I was going to try harder. Oh! if I only hadn't lost my temper last night."

"Don't worry, don't worry," continued Hank, reassuringly, "I'll get you another girl. For my part, I'm glad she's gone. I never could abide her."

"Are you sure she's gone?" interposed grampa. "Go look in her room."

'Tilda Jane's face did not light up. "I know she's gone. I feel it. Little things she's been saying and doing point that way."

"She's not in her room, sir," said Hank, who had, in the meantime, run upstairs.

"Let me see the paper," said grampa, and, propping himself against the doorway, he held out his hand.

"What's this in the corner?" he asked, "this small writing? I can't make it out."

Hank went over to him, while 'Tilda Jane, who had begun to feel faint and miserable, seated herself in her little rocking-chair, and swayed dismally to and fro.

Hank, in no hurry to decipher the small writing at the bottom of the paper, was again gloating over the first of it. "'Gurrls can turrn as well as wurrms. I rrun to rreach a happpy Homme.'—She's hard on the R's. A rregular rrobin forr

them — I say, sissy, isn't Homme the French for man? Good London! she's after a man! I rrun to rreach a happpy Homme. — He won't be happy long after you reach him. On the *contraire,* as the French say, I daresay he's rrunning rrapidly rright frrom you."

"It's a home she wants," moaned 'Tilda Jane, "she has often talked to me about it, and you know how she was in despair and anger last night. She wants someone to love her, and call her their darling."

"My stars and garters!" ejaculated Hank, "that lump!"

"She was jealous of me," continued the little girl. "She thought you and grampa made too much of me."

"I never made much of you," said grampa, stoutly.

"Well, I did," said Hank with equal decision, "and I'll go right on doing it, for a better-hearted little girl than our sissy never lived, and this goose-head is an ungrateful bird to fly away from her."

'Tilda Jane threw him a grateful, but a very doleful glance. "She wants to be in a span with me, Hank. Folks have talked to her about my running away from the asylum. I'm not proud of it, and I never told Perletta about it, but she

thought it was smart, and now she's gone, so she can equal me."

"Let her fly," responded Hank, "I hope her cruise will be long and hearty."

"But we ought to bring her back," remonstrated 'Tilda Jane, "I'll have no pleasure till you do, Hank. She's like a poor lost lamb."

"A lamb — an ugly old goat you mean," grumbled Hank.

"Will you read that postscript?" asked grampa, irritably, "she may give us some information in it."

"Hold on," replied Hank, "till I make it out. Her writing is as queer as she is herself — 'The D-o-double g — The Dogg and the Burrd are out of' — out of what? — 'oh yes, I see — are out of Trrouble.'"

"The bird," screamed 'Tilda Jane, and she was out of her little chair, and up the staircase like a streak of light.

"The dog," repeated grampa, slowly, then his brain began to work, and he wheeled round, and hitched himself toward the bed.

Hank followed him curiously, but, seeing his father convulsively twitching and pulling the bed clothes, he helped him without a word.

The little dog had lost his former habit of waking up early to play, and was now usually sleepy

in the morning. They always had a hard time to quiet him down at night, for he was of an excitable and nervous temperament, and, to make up for this, he often slept till breakfast was half over.

Grampa's face was fiery. "Where is he?" he said, desperately. "I can't find him. My fingers are stiff. He must be rolled up somewhere in the blankets. Look well, Hank — he's small."

At this instant, 'Tilda Jane came flying into the room, and threw herself down on the bed, "My bird, my bird, my darling pigeon is gone — That cruel girl has taken him. She'll never be able to feed him with those big fingers — he can't eat yet himself — he'll starve to death — my dear birdie — my little darling. Oh! Oh! I loved him so," and she stared blankly before her.

Grampa, for a minute, forgot his own impending trouble, in reminiscence. Months and months ago, he had, in a rage, lifted one of his crutches and had struck Poacher to the ground. When 'Tilda Jane saw her pet lying apparently dead, she had turned on him the same terrible, unforgiving, hateful look with which she now gazed into space. The loss of her petted bird had stirred the young girl's nature to the same dreadful depths of long ago — but this time, her unnatural wrath did not last. She suddenly burst into tears, and held out her hands, "Oh Lord! I am a wicked girl, but

I want my pidgie — Grampa, Hank, get me my bird."

"All right, girlie," said Hank soothingly, "just wait a minute, I'll go after him, but now let us find the pup."

"The pup," she echoed, dismally, then, with the same understanding of the perverted Perletta's nature that she had shown before, and that the two men did not possess, she said, "Don't bother looking for him. He's gone too. Poor grampa — poor dear grampa."

It was now grampa's turn to become excited. His face dripping with perspiration, his hair bristling with indignation, he dropped into the big chair by his bed, almost incoherent from wrath. "That girl, that — that — has she — could she steal that pup?"

"Never mind, dad," said Hank in the same soothing tone in which he had addressed 'Tilda Jane, "I'll harness right up, and kite after her. You shall have your pup and pigeon back again."

"That pup," almost screamed grampa, "that pup, as you call him, is a thousand dollar dog!"

Hank opened his mouth wide, and stared speechlessly at him.

"He's a thoroughbred," stammered grampa, "belongs to Mr. Waysmith — He's dead stuck on

him. He's in my care — Oh Lord! what have I done to let that viper rifle me?"

"A thousand dollar dog," repeated Hank, stupidly staring about him, "then what is he doing in this fifty cent house?"

"He's delicate," roared grampa, "Mr. Waysmith was afraid he'd die like most of his family. He brought him here 'cause 'Tilda's such a master hand with dogs. I thought I'd keep him nights to let her have her sleep. I didn't dare to tell you what he was worth, 'cause you'd all be anxious. I've sweated alone, and now that girl's stole in and took him away — I've been false to my trust — I've been false to my trust!" and his white head sank on his breast, in the speechless, hopeless grief of old age.

Only he and 'Tilda Jane understood the real bitterness of his cry. Hank had never suspected his father's defalcation, but even without this knowledge, he was so deeply stirred that he clenched his hands and sudden tears came to his eyes. "Cheer up, dad," he said stoutly. "I'll catch that minx, if she's above ground — now let us quit wailing, and get to business," and, taking on a decided air, and with no further thought either of laughter or tears, he seated himself on the edge of the bed.

Grampa sat beating his stiff old hands on his knees. "Get the police my son — telephone Mr. Waysmith."

Hank laid a quieting arm on his shoulder. "Father," he said seriously, "stop right there. Remember you are a man, not an old baby. Let me check things off — this dog does not belong to you?"

"No, no, I told you he's Mr. Waysmith's dog — he's one of a famous new breed they're starting."

"And he's worth a thousand dollars?"

"Yes, yes, maybe more — I don't know."

"Don't tell anyone that, father. We want to go easy, and not shout his value round town. Once the bad boys know that, they'd make your life miserable trying to steal him."

"I ain't told anyone yet, but you and 'Tilda," said grampa indignantly, "and I don't plan to tell any further, but hurry, son, hurry, and get him back."

"Easy now, dad, easy — I'll have him before night. Now have you any conviction about the way that wild goose would fly?"

"No, no, I don't know anything about her, except that she's all the different kinds of fool a woman can be. I never talked to her. Oh get off — set out, my son. Go tell Mr. Waysmith."

"Sissy," said Hank, turning to the woebegone, but very quiet little figure standing by the door, "sit down in that chair."

'Tilda Jane did as he bade her, and he put some

rapid questions to her. "How long do you think Perletta has had this idea of running away?"

"For some time, Hank. You know she told us when she came here that she would run away if she did not like us."

"Have you any thought about which way she would go?"

'Tilda Jane hesitated. "I think she would go to the woods," she said at last. "She has heard what a time I had in the woods when I ran away, and how I got Poacher there."

"You say you never talked to her about your adventures," said Hank keenly. "Who did talk to her?"

"I guess Mrs. Melançon mostly. I only told a few about my travels. She was one. She told me the other day Perletta had twisted it all out of her. She didn't want to tell, but she is so pliable."

Hank dropped his head on his breast thoughtfully. "The woods are all some distance from Ciscasset," he said, "the question is, which of them would she make for?"

"Go to the police — go to the police," urged grampa. "Tell Mr. Waysmith. It's his dog, he ought to know."

"Sure, sir," replied Hank. "But we don't want the police yet. As I said before, we don't want to advertise his value. I guessed your pup was a

present from Mr. Waysmith, and a relative of his own dog, but I did not know these other circumstances — Now I want to start this ball rolling myself, for Mr. Waysmith does not know Perletta as we do. I want a plan of action before we tell him — Gloriana! I've got it!" and he suddenly sprang into the air, almost startling grampa and 'Tilda Jane out of the small amount of composure remaining to them.

CHAPTER XV

THE PURSUIT OF THE GOOSE

"Look there!" cried Hank, and he pointed to a member of the family who had participated in the general excitement in a quiet, but intensely interested way.

'Tilda Jane and grampa stared at the doorway. There, on his haunches, sat the intelligent hound Poacher, drinking in every word that Hank uttered.

"Ain't that the hound that used to dog deer," cried Hank, "ain't he the fellow that used to track his master's family all through the woods — ain't he the friend 'Tilda has told us about finding her most frozen dead in the snow — look at him. He ain't thoroughbred deerhound. His coat ain't rough, it's short and hard, and he's got a big head, not slender like a real deerhound. I tell you he's more bloodhound than anything else — now, sissy," and he turned to 'Tilda Jane, and continued with apparent irrelevance, "run upstairs, and see if Perletta has left any old duds behind her."

A great light broke over grampa's face as 'Tilda

Jane jumped from her seat, and went running from the room.

"She's taken only her new clothes," she said breathlessly, as she came back a minute later, "she's left all her old ones."

"Any old shoes, sissy?" asked Hank.

"Yes, brother."

"Run get me one."

'Tilda Jane, with her hand on her side, scurried out of the room a second time.

When she came back with a sample of monstrous and grotesquely large footgear in her hand, Hank took it as carefully as if it were a dainty satin slipper, and, holding it out to Poacher, said, "Good dog, smell it."

The sleek, gracious hound ran his muzzle all over it, and Hank said rapidly, "He'll do — he'll do. I see by his face. He ain't pure bloodhound, but he's got the taste for scent. Poacher," he went on, addressing the animal as seriously as if he were a person, "that goose Perletta has flown away, and we want you to run right along the ground and find her."

Poacher's brown eyes sparkled, and he slightly agitated his tail.

"We're depending on you, boy," continued Hank, laying a hand on his velvety head. "Now you've lived here a year and more, good board, fine keep,

and nothing to do. We've all been good to you, and now I want you to toil a little."

"Oh get to work — get to work," exclaimed grampa impatiently. "Don't talk so much."

"Sir," said Hank with dignity, "I'm talking with a purpose. I'm laying a business proposition before this dog, and he's getting interested. Poacher," he went on, turning to the animal, "that goose girl took under one wing your little friend the pup, and under the other, your young mistress's little pigeon — Now shall we find these pets and bring them back?"

Hank's voice was not loud, but it was strangely animating, and, as he finished, Poacher rose up, and moving restlessly about the bed-room and kitchen, began to whine excitedly.

"Now smell this treasure," said Hank, presenting the shoe to him, "this coarse leather has felt the impress of the beauteous Perletta's fairy foot. Smell it with all your dog mind."

Poacher for the second time ran his nose all over the leather, then looked up in Hank's face.

"Find her," hissed Hank, "seek her — get her for us!"

Poacher, in the most intense vibrating sympathy with Hank's earnestness, ran to the door, and looked over his shoulder.

Hank started up. "Good! I'll try him. 'Tilda

Jane, shove some crackers and cheese in the pocket of my overcoat, and I'll run harness Milkweed. Keep the dog shut in here, till you see me coming out of the barn."

"What about Mr. Waysmith?" inquired grampa, "what about him?"

"Just as soon as Poacher and I leave," replied Hank, "you, 'Tilda, get the breakfast. Now mind you take a cup of good hot milk, and plenty to eat. Then at eight thirty, do you go to the mill. Ask for Mr. Waysmith. Tell him the exact facts of the case, and say I'll telephone him later in the day," and, without another word, Hank rushed from the house, knowing that his young adopted sister would faithfully carry out his instructions.

A few minutes later, 'Tilda Jane, grampa and Poacher watching at the bed-room window, saw him drive away from the barn.

'Tilda Jane opened the window, and, with a caress on Poacher's velvety head, allowed him to jump out. Hank held out the old shoe to the dog, who again smelled it carefully, then ran in a curious way about the back yard.

The snow was not deep on the ground now, but there was a light covering of it, and fortunately no change had taken place in the weather since Perletta's flight.

Poacher soon gave up the old tracks leading from

the back door to the barn, and struck the fresh one by the front gate. Here he set off at a good steady pace down the road toward French Row. He did not run excitedly, but in a cool business-like way, his nose close to the snow, and Hank with a whoop of delight waved the old shoe at his father and 'Tilda Jane, and told the dancing Milkweed to keep close behind her friend, the hound.

As he went deliberately down the road, 'Tilda Jane and grampa turned and looked at each other. Not till the last jingle of the sleigh bells died away on the early morning air, did the little girl speak. Then she threw her arms round the neck of the excited old man, and, after a vehement, "We'll get them, grampa — we'll get them," she kissed his troubled face, and hurried to the kitchen to prepare the breakfast.

When they sat soberly taking their mush and milk, she said, "I might have guessed Perletta would take that road. There's a camp of Indians on it."

"Do you think she would go to them?" asked grampa, anxiously, "I've heard that Indians eat dogs. They wouldn't know his value. They'd kill that little pup."

"I don't think Perletta would go to live with Indians now, grampa," said the little girl consolingly. "She's got too fond of her comfort. She

just likes that road because there are Indians on it. She has a funny mind, you know. I think she's looking for a house just like this, where some aged person will adopt her."

"If she wants a house like this," observed grampa in a scornful and mystified tone, "why didn't she stay here?"

"Well, Perletta is a crosswise kind of person," said 'Tilda Jane in a puzzled voice, "and yet there's a sense in her folly, 'cause I remember yesterday she was fitting the pup in those old fruit baskets, hanging up in the wood-house, and the one he fitted in is gone."

"Didn't you catch on to her mischief?" asked grampa, "and if you didn't, why didn't you?"

"Oh how could I suspect," said 'Tilda Jane warmly, "how could I think she would take that cute little boy out in the cold?"

"And he's travelling about the country in a basket with holes in it this cold weather," said grampa angrily, "that animal fresh from my warm bed — Oh! that marplot — that snake in the grass!"

"She'll keep him warm, grampa," said 'Tilda Jane quickly, "she'll stuff him too, if she has to go hungry herself. She would kill him with kindness if she had him long enough. I'm not worrying about that. It's the missing of him and the pigeon. Why, I feel as if there'd been a death in

the house," and she looked about her with a shudder.

Grampa said nothing, and she continued, "Oh! it was so sweet to see you coming out of your room in the morning, with that little fellow hanging on to your trousers' legs, and nibbling at your crutches — and then he'd curl himself up into a little bow of pleasure, and run to say good morning to everyone. Can't you see him licking Poacher and Gippie and going down flat before Hank, and then jumping up in the air. And then when the house got still and lonely, he'd drag his big meat bones about and make such a joyful noise — I just feel lost without him," and, staring miserably about the room, her eye caught the half blind, wandering Gippie who was sniffing about corners, and under tables and chairs, quite well aware that something had happened, but not quite sure what it was.

"Come here, my only treasure," said the little girl, and she lifted him up and laid him on her lap.

Grampa was saying something in a grim tone of voice. "You're not talking much about the pigeon."

"The pigeon," repeated 'Tilda Jane, "that little knowing bird. Why he's in my mind all the time under the other things I'm talking about. You know how I feel about him, grampa. I loved him

just like a little brother. Of course, I put you and Hank first, but I don't believe God minds our loving those little creatures next. He makes them, anyway."

"Which did you like best, Perletta or the pigeon?" asked grampa inexorably.

"Oh! what a cruel question," exclaimed the little girl, "only you don't mean to be cruel, grampa. It often comes in my own mind. The pigeon and the dogs are so good, and Perletta is so dreadful. I'd say to myself, 'Suppose the house was on fire, which would I save first, or suppose we were all in a boat and were upset. Would I save Perletta or the animals?'"

Grampa, in spite of his distress of mind, gave utterance to a low, shrill cackle at the picture of the slight 'Tilda Jane bearing away the huge Perletta from any impending danger. "I guess you'd better hear the other side of the question," he said. "It would be whether that big moose would save you, not you save her."

'Tilda Jane was going on in a low, intense voice. "I've tried to love her — I did love her a little, but this running away and stealing our pets, has given her a powerful set-back in my mind."

The old man gave her a shrewd look. "Sissy," he said slowly, "trouble at breakfast brings dyspepsy. Put your mind on your food, and stop

crying in your mush. Tears are salt, and this cornmeal is overseasoned now."

'Tilda Jane threw him a grateful glance, and wiped her eyes. "I feel like an old woman today," she said languidly, "and some days I feel quite young, but I will eat to keep my strength up. Have a drop more coffee, grampa dear. I've saved some cream for another cup."

"If you take half in your milk," he said shortly, "come now, share and share alike."

The little girl drank her milk, then with a glance at the clock got up and said, "I'll just run along to the mill, grampa dear. Shall I go and ask one of the Melançon children to come and sit with you?"

"No," he said shortly, "I never hung my dirty linen on any fences. I shut it up in the closet at home. Keep your doors closed, and no one need come round with palavering questions."

"The Melançons are very kind, grampa," remarked 'Tilda Jane, just a little reproachfully.

"I know, I know," he said shaking his head, "but to sit alone with my trouble is company enough for me."

'Tilda Jane put on her hat and coat without worrying him further. He was in such improved health, that she had no scruples about leaving him alone.

When she got into the out-door air, Mother

Nature once more came to her aid. Early in the morning, the sky had been overcast, and snow was threatened. Now the sun was breaking through the dull clouds, and a strip of glorious blue sky was unfolding itself to the fascinated gaze of the little girl.

"Just like a banner of hope," she said, enthusiastically, "how good God is. When I'm way down, in despair, there's some little sign of love up on high."

CHAPTER XVI

A TEDIOUS WAITING

GRAMPA had a pretty solemn, heart-searching time after 'Tilda Jane left him. She had made up a good fire in the stove, and he sat by it, and surveyed the kitchen usually so tidy, now in such a state of disorder, for 'Tilda Jane had had no time to clear up before she left home. However he had no eyes for details just now. His mind was in a whirl. He hated noise and confusion, and loved tranquillity. Why had this grotesque trouble come upon him? What was he grieving for, anyway? — A point of honour — No, not altogether. After reflecting a short time, he felt that Mr. Waysmith would not be hard on him. At first blush, he had been overcome by the thought that a second time he had failed in his duty, but in reality there had been no failure. He was man of business enough to know that he could not be held responsible for the sin of a low, common thief who had stolen into his room in the dead of night, and despoiled him

of the property of his benefactor. No, it was not the theft alone that was grieving him. He knew now — he could follow out his thread of thought as he was alone and quiet, with all those restless young people out of the house.

He was an old man who had once been young. For years he had been laid aside and shelved, and held in no particular estimation by anyone. A young girl, persistent and affectionate, had suddenly appeared on the threshold of his lonely home. His son had sent her, and he could not get rid of her, and finally he had come to like her. Through her, he had been reinstated, and had been given an interest in life. Now he understood what a source of intense gratification it had been to him, that he could be of service to the proudest and richest man in Ciscasset. He, Hobart Dillson, was somebody. He thought he had not cared for the opinion of the community in which he lived. He had cared just as much as anyone else cared, and now this employment, this consideration, had been snatched from him. He would again sink into obscurity. He would have no object in life, and his head drooped gradually lower and lower.

He had not cared much for the small animal entrusted to him. It was what the animal represented that he cared for most — but was it? He looked down at the floor. It seemed to him that he felt

the soft nibbling mouth, the affectionate pressure of the little head against his ankles. The animal certainly liked him. Every morning, it had seemed a new and exquisite delight to the little beast, to crowd and push his way to the top of the bed, to lick tenderly the old hands, and the old face on the pillow if he could get at it, though grampa usually compromised by letting him polish off his ears with his tiny pink tongue.

"The critter seemed fond of me," he muttered, "and I miss him — yes, I do — there's no one else makes so much fuss over me," and two slow painful tears — the self-pitying tears of old age, rolled slowly down his cheeks.

Just at this minute, the front door flew open, and before grampa had time to compose himself, 'Tilda Jane rushed into the kitchen, and behind her coming with more rapidity than grampa would have believed possible, stalked Mr. Waysmith.

The little girl did not say a word. After a tap on grampa's shoulder, and a gesture in the direction of her companion, she ran up the kitchen staircase, closing the door behind her in a decided fashion, that meant she would neither hear nor see what went on below.

Mr. Waysmith sat down opposite grampa, and, seeing that the distressed old man was making a huge effort to compose himself, he drew off his

gloves, leaned over the stove, and made some remark about the fine, frosty morning.

Grampa, blinking his moist eyelids, tried to scrutinize the face of his caller. Was he vexed at his loss, or did he minimize it?

"The pup will come back," said Mr. Waysmith at last in a tranquil voice. "Don't worry, Dillson."

"He may get a chill," said grampa hoarsely.

"He's in good condition, it won't hurt him if he does."

Grampa's heart sank. The merchant had probably come to tell him that when the pup did return, he would find another guardian for him. Well, he would try to soften his fall, and he said shortly, "I guess you could take him away now, sir, he's pretty hearty."

"I won't take him away, if you will consent to hold him for a few months yet," returned Mr. Waysmith. "I don't know of anyone who would take the pains you are taking with him."

Poor old grampa flushed with pleasure. What had that little witch 'Tilda been telling the merchant about him? Probably that he let the pup sleep with him.

"That girl that lives with me," said grampa hastily, "thinks all her geese are swans."

"That is a gift," said Mr. Waysmith with a

smile. "A pity it is not more generally distributed. Few of us have it."

"She is a kind of a swan herself," said grampa heartily.

"Yes, she is," replied Mr. Waysmith, and the dull kitchen stove seemed to reflect the picture of the earnest, warm-hearted, young orphan who a short time before had sat in his office begging him to do something to comfort grampa, and please not to take the pup from him, for he loved it as if it were a baby.

Mr. Waysmith got up. "I must go back to the mill. I wanted to beg you to have no anxiety about the dog. I have perfect confidence in your son, but if he fails to get it, I will see what I can do. You will keep the pup, will you?"

Grampa looked up into the kind face bending over him.

"As a favour," said Mr. Waysmith. "We are old friends, Dillson."

"Friends!" and grampa, almost suffocated with pleasure, thought of a past episode, suddenly and generously blotted out.

"Sir," he exclaimed, hobbling to his feet, "I'll bring up as many pups as you choose to fetch me."

"I will remember that," said Mr. Waysmith, and his eye ran with satisfaction over the rejuvenated

face, then shaking hands with his former employee, he walked deliberately from the house.

"Isn't he sweet — isn't he dear and lovely?" cried 'Tilda Jane, running down the staircase after she had from an upper window watched Mr. Waysmith going down the front walk. "Don't you just love to have him visit you, grampa?"

Grampa said nothing, and she went on, "When I got to the mill I was half scared. There was such a rattling and roaring, and so many men about, but peace was in his office. Oh! the dear good face of him, as he listened to my tale. I wasn't a mite scared of him as I used to be."

"He is a good man," said grampa feelingly.

"Yes, truly good, but it takes a while to find it out. I thought he was an old crossie at first, but I see now, he's dependable, when he finds he can trust you."

"He's a man that has been deceived over and over again," said grampa. "Hoaxed in business, and fooled till he trusts no one, man, or woman, or child either, till he is sure of them."

"I used to like his son better," said 'Tilda Jane, "but I guess I don't know everything."

"No, you don't," said grampa decidedly, "you're only in your pin feathers. It stands to reason you can't know as much as old, tough things that have weathered many a gale — not but what you're smart

for a girl," he added, when 'Tilda Jane looked crestfallen, "very smart, and you've a good heart, sissy. That counts more than brains — Hark — don't I hear something?"

"No, grampa," she said affectionately. "It's only the wind round the house, but I know what you're thinking of. You're expecting a message from Hank, and so am I, and I believe it will come. To make the time pass, I'll tidy the kitchen, and get the things ready for dinner. Of course, I can't go to school to-day."

"You'll miss that girl about the work," said grampa, "she was big and strong."

"Oh! she'll come back," said 'Tilda Jane with assurance.

Grampa gazed at her from under his white eyebrows. What a forgiving heart. Did she really suppose that he and Hank would allow that monster of ingratitude to enter their house again? However he would say nothing at present. The child had trouble enough. She pretended to be very brave and hopeful, but he noticed that she retired very often to the pantry, and that her eyes were red when she came out.

"Tell me how you are getting on in school," said grampa suddenly, with a benevolent desire to give her something to think about.

"Pretty well," she said slowly. "It's a wonder

to find how many things I don't know that are in books. I know more about things out of books than the big girls, but when it comes to reading, writing, and figures, I have to go to work with the little ones. I'm not very bright to learn, grampa, spite of all the time Mrs. Tracy spent on me. It seems as if I get tired when I open a book."

"You've been cheated of your childhood," said grampa irritably, "and by nature you're a fretter. The fretters run things in this world, but they wear out quick."

'Tilda Jane sighed, and, going to the stove, put the potatoes she had been paring on to boil.

How long the morning seemed, and what a dreadful stillness pervaded the house. Gippie scarcely stirred in his box, and she and grampa gave up talking, and, staring eloquently at each other, listened intently for the welcome sound outside that would announce the coming of a messenger boy.

"He ought to have got here by this time," said grampa at last. "Perletta would have a regular daddy-longlegs gait, but still Milkweed goes like the wind. I fear Poacher's having trouble with tracking her."

'Tilda Jane was paying no attention to him. One lean, brown hand was held in the air, and her head was slightly on one side. "There's someone com-

ing," she said solemnly, and, quickly springing toward the door leading into the front hall, she disappeared from view.

In a trice, she was back again, waving an envelope in her hand. "Oh! read it, read it, grampa, there's good news inside. I feel it bursting through."

With shaking fingers, grampa tore open the cover, and read aloud, "'Wild goose trapped. Four-Legs and Two-Legs well and hearty. Home at five. Hank.'"

'Tilda Jane in moments of intense mental excitement, when words failed her, was in the habit of executing a peculiar and unique dance, and now, catching up her somewhat scant skirts, her lank hair bobbing about her thin face, she began to move in a sidelong fashion about the room.

Grampa neither moved nor spoke. With stoical composure, he watched the progress of the dance, waited like a gentleman for its finish, and then, after leaving a reasonable space of time for the exhausted girl to repose herself, he said with extreme gentleness, "Sissy, please get me my dog book."

'Tilda Jane, still wrapped in ecstatic silence, gave him his large book on "The Dog," and then went with dignity to the pantry and returned with a plate in her hand.

Grampa glanced up from his book. It was her

dough plate, and she was going to make fresh pills for the pigeon.

"Good," he muttered, "the thing will be fair clemmed," then he buried himself in the pages, "Treatment of Pups After Exposure to Cold."

He was too excited to read, and, after a short time, pushed the book from him, and followed the movements of 'Tilda Jane, who had begun to set the table in the dining-room.

She was doing her work in a swift, gliding manner, her feet seemed to scarcely touch the yellow, painted floor, and her black eyes kept rolling ecstatically toward grampa.

He saw that she was now suffering to talk, and he opened the conversation with a gracious, "I see the telephone message is dated from Karakunk."

"Yes," replied the little girl breathlessly, "and where is Karakunk? I'm pining to know."

"It's a settlement about twenty miles from here."

"And do you suppose he caught her there, grampa? — is it on the road she set out to go? — do you think she'd get a lift on her trip? — how do you s'pose she looked when Hank caught up to her? — what do you think he'd say? — my! I'd not like to be in her shoes — won't she be glad to get home? — running away sounds fine, but it isn't funny to be all alone on a dark road, far from everyone that knows you."

Grampa smiled agreeably at her torrent of questions, and sniffed expectantly in the direction of the stove. "That smell of corned beef and cabbage seems good to my nostrils," he said at last. "I'm powerful hungry."

"You ate scarcely a mite of breakfast," exclaimed his faithful little companion, "Oh grampa! isn't it good to live when everybody behaves himself and herself?"

"It's the wicked that give spice to life," replied grampa, bitterly. "If we were all good, things would be on a dead level."

"I'd take the goodness," said 'Tilda Jane. "Badness is so upsetting."

"Well, sissy," continued grampa, "I'll answer some of your questions now," and from that time until dinner was ready, and while it was in progress, and afterward, when the little girl was washing the dishes, they talked almost incessantly, speculating about Hank and his journey, and Perletta and the purloined pets — where they were, what they were doing, how the capture had been effected, how Mr. Waysmith was feeling, and, with all their discussion, their intense interest could not exhaust the subject.

Long before five, they were both in their company clothes, sitting by the dining-room fire. This was a great occasion — one of the greatest in their

lives, and they must honour it. There was a roaring fire in the hall stove, another in the kitchen, 'Tilda Jane, in the intervals of talk, had dashed about the whole house, putting it in order. The pup's toys were laid in a row on the floor, and the pigeon's box had been brought downstairs, and had been half filled with fresh yellow straw. Hank's room was as neat as wax, and 'Tilda Jane having no cut flowers to put in it, had carried up her best pot of variegated geranium. Even Perletta's room had been tidied, though no plant was put in it.

Grampa shook his head over this latter preparation, but did not impart his misgivings to 'Tilda Jane.

At a quarter to five, 'Tilda Jane could no longer remain by the fire, and, going into grampa's bedroom, opened the window a crack, and sat by it, calling out news to the old man who remained in the dining room.

"Sleigh bells, grampa — oh! only a big team — a load of hay. Someone has run short, and is hauling it in from the country. More bells — an old man and woman. She's got a cap basket on her knee. Looks like a farmer and his wife coming to spend Sunday with their relatives in town — Dr. Gresler dashing by with his gray horse. I heard there was a case of scarlet fever out French Row. I hope it isn't so."

Five o'clock came and went, and 'Tilda Jane could no longer sit still, but stood leaning out the window, now thrown far up.

"Any sound of our bells," called grampa anxiously, when she was silent for a minute.

"Not yet, grampa, but I'm listening — I'm listening. Hark! what is that so faint and sweet in the distance. Ting-a-ling-a-ling. They're our bells, grampa — they're our bells — and I can see Hank's fur cap. The Lord has let our treasures come home alive. Oh! Oh! Oh!" and, with a final shriek, the excited girl went out the window into a small bank of snow lingering dejectedly by the side of the house, and then with twinkling heels disappeared out of the back yard and down the road.

"What did you say, 'Tilda?" called grampa from the dining-room. "Are they our bells, or are they not? — Coronation! is the girl deaf?" and he irritably struck a crutch on the floor.

No answer came, and grampa got up and shuffled excitedly into his room. There they were — coming gaily up the road. Hank had stopped to take 'Tilda Jane in, and she was gobbling, ducking, pecking at something. His pup of course — his restored pup. The mischievous, tiresome, little rogue, and yet his own pet pup — the only creature who would humbly beg on his dancing feet the pleasure of caressing a crusty, worn-out, old man.

Grampa, for the first time in many years, uttered a kind of prayer. As he stood at the window, his white hair fluttering in the chilly wind, he muttered reverently, "I thank a kind Providence for all mercies," then he added under his breath, "Especially for not sending back that viper girl."

CHAPTER XVII

THE RETURN OF THE TREASURES

When 'Tilda Jane sprang into the sleigh, she had uttered a dismayed "Where's Perletta?" then she had speedily forgotten her, for the wild Irishman, Handy Andy, Lord Scatterbrain, had wriggled from Hank's embracing arm, and was springing, prancing, and licking her in spasms of dancing delight.

The pigeon too, hearing 'Tilda Jane's voice, was beating himself about a box at Hank's feet, and was calling hoarsely for recognition.

"Poor mite, he was nearly starved when I got him," exclaimed Hank, "and I didn't take time to give him more than half what he wanted."

"There're fresh pills at home," cried 'Tilda Jane, and, diving under the rug, she brought little Housetop from his prison, and wrapped him in her apron.

"Run in the house, 'Tilda," said Hank when they reached their own gate, "I'll just drive down to the drug store, and telephone Mr. Waysmith."

Grampa was standing in the wide open front door.

"Hello, father!" cried Hank, "call your pup," and he put Handy Andy out in the snow.

"Andy, Andy," said grampa, in a voice that cracked when he tried to raise it.

The pup cared little for his tones. They were dulcet to him, and, tearing up the walk, he sprang at the old man, ran up his legs and his back, fell down, rolled over and over, jumped in the air, agitating and extending his pleading pink tongue, till at last grampa took compassion, and stooping down, lifted him in his arms.

The little dog rarely barked. Grampa had scarcely yet heard his pretty puppy voice. He was thoroughbred, the old man used to say to himself proudly. "Only curs bark," but just now he had to change his opinion, for Handy Andy in his excitement, was yelping like the veriest cur.

Grampa turned, and, walking with one crutch only, hitched himself into the kitchen. He had his pet alone for the space of two minutes, and, after looking carefully about to be sure he was not watched, he took the little wriggling head between his hands, and pressed his face against it.

An instant later, 'Tilda Jane and the pigeon, with Poacher in close attendance, burst into the kitchen. "Oh! my darling bird," said the little girl, "he is almost famished. Wait, Housetop,

wait till I get your pills," and, sitting down, she reached a hand toward the plate on the table.

The half starved bird was so excited that she could scarcely persuade him to keep still long enough to get the pills down his throat. Crying hoarsely, flapping his full grown wings, and embracing and blinding her with them, he seemed to reproach her for not making more haste. 'Tilda Jane at last wound her apron firmly round his wings, and then, dipping each pill in water, slipped it down his throat. With gurgling coos of delight, he received them, and, after feeling his protruding crop, 'Tilda Jane gave him a drink, and set him in his box that she had hung on the kitchen wall.

Little Housetop snuggled down at once upon the straw, and, with his sleepy brown eyes opening and shutting, alternately napped, and watched his friends in the kitchen.

Poacher had gone under the stove with Gippie who was usually undemonstrative, but who now was taking part in the family rejoicing. On seeing or rather smelling Poacher, Gippie had fallen into a mild rapture, and was now lying beside him, excitedly licking the particles of snow off his tired feet.

Grampa chuckled as his eye fell on them, and he looked affectionately down at the pup who had at last gone to sleep on his knee.

'Tilda Jane was bustling about the kitchen, putting tea in the teapot, and blissfully surveying her re-united family.

Hank had just come stamping into the room, "Well, I've made Mr. Waysmith comfortable, also given Milkweed something to consider. That mare just talked this morning. She knows what's going on about as well as we do. I declare if she didn't watch Poacher, and then put her own young nose to the ground. She's a gem — A cup of tea, 'Tilda, that will go right to the spot. I had a good dinner at Cascapod, but I'm ready for something more."

"Now tell us about it," said the little girl, when Hank sat with his flowered cup, labelled "A Present To A Friend," in his hand, "and first, oh Hank — where's Perletta?"

The young man buried his face in his big cup, and did not reply.

"I thought when I didn't see her in the sleigh," continued the little girl anxiously, "she must be walking behind. Then when she wasn't there, I knew you must have dropped her somewhere. When will she be here, Hank?"

He shook his head. "I don't know, sissy."

"Oh! Hank, what did you tell her to do?"

"Well, sissy, I caught up to her at just twelve o'clock this morning — would have got her sooner,

but Milkweed cast a shoe, and I had to go to a blacksmith's, and then Poacher had some trouble with the trail, it being what they call 'cold.'"

"What was she doing when you reached her?" asked 'Tilda Jane.

"Poking along the road about a mile beyond Karakunk — her broad-acred feet planking up and down like machinery, puppy in a basket on her arm, her bundle slung on her back, and the pigeon tucked in the front of her coat. She'd walked all night, only stopped at Cascapod for breakfast and a rest, then plodded on through Karakunk district. She knew I was coming, for she kept looking over her shoulder as I sailed up the long straight road through the woods behind her. You'd have thought she'd stop, but she didn't. I never said a word till I reached her, then I remarked as pleasant as you please, 'The top of the morning to you, Handy Andy, wild Irishman — The top of the morning, black pigeon.' I never spoke to her — She turned round with a grin. My! but she's strong to travel all night, and not to turn a feather. Without a word, she handed me the basket and the pigeon, then, my dear hearers, wasn't she going to pack herself in beside me? I wheeled Milkweed round, and set off away from her, and she yelled after me, 'Hank, Hank,' — at first, then, 'Mr. Hank, Mr. Hank.'"

"I never could get her to say Mr. Hank," mur-

mured 'Tilda Jane, who was listening with a troubled face.

"She said it this morning," remarked Hank grimly, "or I'd never have stopped. When the sweet sound of my name, with a handle to it, came floating on the breeze, I turned round, and cried out, 'Did anyone call me?' 'I did,' she bellowed, with all the starch gone out of her, 'I want to tell you I was runnin' away — like leetle 'Tilda Jane.'"

"'Well, run right on,' I yelled back, 'don't mind me.'"

"'But you've come arter me,' she shouted, 'I thought you would.'"

"'I came after the pup and the pigeon,' I roared good and loud. 'We did have a servant girl — we ain't got one now.'"

"Oh! Hank," said 'Tilda Jane reproachfully, "she hates to be called a servant."

"Now look here, sissy," said Hank decidedly, "there's a lot of sweet, mealy-mouthed pity in this world that ruins people. Servant — what is there in that word to scare anyone? Ain't I a servant — don't I mind Mr. Waysmith? Ain't you a servant, and a good little one to father and me? Why, don't even the President say he's the servant of the people. Everybody serves somebody, but, good land! we're all getting so stuck up, that soon we'll

be a nation of masters, with no one to boss but pigs and hosses."

"That's so," said grampa, striking the arm of his chair vigorously, "that's so, boy. It usen't to be in the old days. In those times, servant was servant, and master was master. Now we're all ladies and gentlemen."

"But won't you let Perletta come back?" cried 'Tilda Jane in dismay.

Hank looked at his father. "You speak, dad."

"Sissy," said the old man kindly, "I'm easy in my mind, and I don't want to be hard. You liked that cracked simpleton. If Hank don't object, I'll agree to her return, but mind, no more cosseting. If she comes, 'tis as servant — plain servant, with wages. If she don't like it, she can get out. We've got to have someone to do the work, and there ain't many girls going — but 'tis mostly to oblige you."

"So say I," remarked Hank warmly, "and as she ran away of her own accord, let her come back of her own accord."

"But she's so foolish, so provoking," said the little girl, "no one will tell her — she won't know what to do."

"Don't you believe it," said Hank. "She's got some sense in that cracked pate of hers, and see here, sissy, I thought of you and your good heart,

and I looked up the Humane Society in Karakunk. Their agent has an eye on her. She'll be watched and reported to us, but I told them not to interfere, unless they had to, for my private opinion is that Perletta is stumping her way back here as fast as she can. Even a pig knows where the litter and fodder are best."

'Tilda Jane became slightly reassured, but her face was still anxious and unhappy, and the two men looked apprehensively at each other.

"That pup's tired out, isn't he?" remarked Hank with a view to changing the subject.

"Dead beat," replied grampa. "He wouldn't look at his toys, and he's been in my room twice, scratching at the bed for me to put him on it. 'Tilda Jane, I'm feared he's torn a hole in the quilt."

"Let him tear fifty," said the little girl affectionately, "it's so joyful to have him back."

"I guess I'll give him some supper, and put him to bed," said grampa, "maybe a little medicine too. His throat isn't as bad as I feared it would be, but he's rattling considerable."

"Dad," exclaimed Hank, "look at his sides. He's as plump as a dumpling. Perletta crammed him good. For the love of puppyhood, put him to bed fasting, even from pills — See him shake. He's dreaming over the past night and day. I say, that

was a moving experience for a pup. He's fagged out, mind as well as body."

Grampa rose, and limped into his bed-room. "Where's my red dressing-gown, sissy?" he called. "The pup don't like this old bed quilt for a cover. 'Tis too plain and dark."

'Tilda Jane got up and found the gown, then came back to her seat by the fire.

"Ain't you going to give us any supper, sissy?" asked Hank, interrupting her train of thought.

She jumped up. "Oh dear! I was forgetting, and you must be dreadfully hungry — Hank, you won't be too cross with Perletta when she comes back?"

The young man's eyes twinkled. "I'll be all sugar, and honey and roses. You just wait, sissy."

"I wish she could get home before bed-time," murmured 'Tilda Jane as she moved about the room.

She had her wish. She and grampa and Hank sat pretty late by the dining-room fire that night, going over and over their experiences of the day, for they had to tell Hank everything that had happened during his absence. He was greatly pleased to hear that Mr. Waysmith had called, and got 'Tilda Jane to relate every detail connected with the visit. Then he wanted his father's account of it, and at eleven P. M. the old man was just telling

how Mr. Waysmith had said they were old friends, when a timid knock was heard at the front door.

The knock was plainly perceptible, for they were sitting with the door into the hall wide open, and Hank with a shrewd nod of his head, uttered a decided, "That's a tap of the goose's wing."

"Is it Perletta?" cried 'Tilda Jane, springing up, and almost overturning Gippie from her lap.

"Yes, sissy, but hold back. I'm the one to interview her. You may listen, if you like," and, with a mischievous face, Hank went tramping in a slow and ponderous fashion through the hall.

"Who's there?" 'Tilda Jane and grampa heard him say in a loud and pompous voice.

"'Me'?" he exclaimed an instant later, "and who is 'me'?"

"You know," said Perletta stubbornly from the outside.

"Past eleven o'clock," bawled Hank with a magisterial air, "honest folks in bed, and rogues a-running. If you don't give your name, how do I know you ain't a thief? We had one in the house last night — stole some valuable property that I've been all day recovering."

Perletta took some time to think this over, then she said, "I'm hum to bide."

Hank threw the door wide open, "Why, it must be my long lost brother who ran away to sea ten

years ago. He's the only one out of this home. Oh! who are you?" he uttered coldly, as his eye fell on the somewhat bedraggled Perletta.

"You know," she said gruffly, "quit your foolin'."

"You're the dead copy of a girl we took from an orphan asylum," said Hank in pretended astonishment, "the dead copy. Enough to be her twin sister. Her name was Merletta or Gerletta, or some such odd call-word. Ever hear of her?"

"I'm her," said Perletta solemnly.

"Oh no you're not," said Hank shaking his head. "She ran away."

"She's come back," said Perletta in deep, almost manly tones.

"I assure you," replied Hank gently, "that she would never come back. She is running in search of a happy home. We're dreadful people in this house — fight all the time."

"I set store by fights," said Perletta, the strongest desire of whose heart was now that of pleasing.

"Do you want a place?" asked Hank kindly.

"Yes, sir," and Perletta leaned wearily against the door post. Even her iron constitution was beginning to feel the strain of the past day and night.

"How much wages do you want?"

"Three dollars a week," replied Perletta promptly.

"I never give more than two," said Hank.

"All right, sir," she said humbly.

"What is your character?" asked Hank, "are you honest and willing?"

She bobbed her head.

"Never steal?"

"I never stole a pin's wuth in my life," she exclaimed indignantly.

"Except live stock," muttered Hank. Then he said aloud, "Where is your written character from your last mistress? I'm a little fussy about my servants."

Perletta did not wince at the opprobrious epithet. "I never had no writings," she said seriously, "my last boss was a man, and he would'nt give me none."

"Have a care now," said Hank sternly, "running down late employers isn't going to get you a berth here. I daresay that nice young man who hired you last found you such a trapsey, mopsey baggage that he was glad to get rid of you."

Perletta maintained a discreet silence, and Hank went on, "Can you wash and iron, and bake, and scrub?"

"Yes, sir," said Perletta meekly.

"And do you dote on animals and old men, and girls — 'cause we've got specimens of all."

"I just hanker arter old men and children," she

said with great humility, "and as for dumb critters, I like 'em better than speakin' ones."

"Come in," said Hank grandly, "this is the place for you. On second thoughts, no," he went on, barring the way. "Go round to the back door. I find it makes my servants toploftical to come in the same door I do. I'll let you in at the wood-house door, and don't you ever let me see you use this front entrance," and he shut the door in her face.

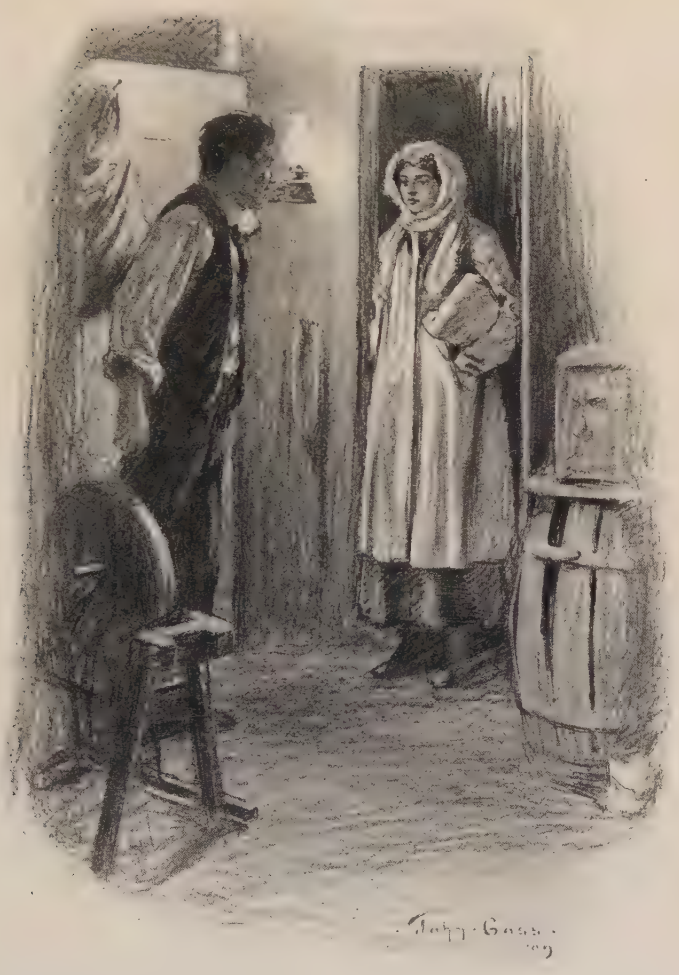
On his way to the wood-house, he peeped in the dining-room. His father sat with a broad grin on his face. 'Tilda Jane looked rather distressed.

"Mushy-hearted," muttered Hank, "that's the way with girls and women. No discipline among themselves. Well, Perletta ain't going to lovey-dovey this family, while I'm round," and he lifted the hook on the back door.

Perletta entered with great docility, and stood expectantly before him

Hank stared at her, and she said slyly, "What's the way upstairs, sir, and what room be I to have?"

He chuckled inwardly, "Quite a witsnapper," then he said, pointing to a rough stairway at the back of the wood-house, "Go up there, and walk straight ahead. You'll find a room on the right that belonged to your unworthy predecessor. Take it, and keep it neater than she left it — Wait a bit,



"'WHAT'S THE WAY UPSTAIRS, SIR, AND WHAT ROOM BE I TO HAVE?'"

till I get you a lantern. You might stumble, the house being strange to you."

"Could I set by the fire a spell, and warm myself?" she asked, gazing wistfully through the open door at the kitchen stove.

He surveyed her red face and hands. "No, you can't. The blood is galloping through your veins, and you're not cold. You're only trying to pry into family secrets. Go to bed."

"I'm main hungry," she said with increased wistfulness.

"Get upstairs," he said imperiously, "my adopted sister will put a plate of cold victuals outside your door presently."

Perletta, with the utmost politeness and amiability, obeyed him, saying agreeably as she closed the stair door, "Good night, sir."

Hank hurried into the dining-room, and shutting the door, burst into one of his enjoyable fits of laughter. "I've broke that plunging will. She'll not Hank me again, nor will she run in search of a happy home."

Even 'Tilda Jane was smiling now. "It did seem good to hear her speak nice and respectful," she said, "instead of so impudent and pert."

CHAPTER XVIII

PERLETTA'S PETS

One charming spring day — charming overhead, but unspeakably muddy underfoot, 'Tilda Jane and Hank had been for a drive. He was teaching her how to guide Milkweed, and often, after school hours, Perletta, who was as good as a man about the stable, on account of her strength, would harness Milkweed, and 'Tilda Jane would drive down to the mill to bring Hank home.

On this particular day they had had a short enjoyable spin into the country, and now he stood grooming Milkweed in the sunny yard. He did not mind the mud, for he had on high rubber boots, nor did his beautiful mare dislike it. She stood on her long legs, twitching her tail occasionally, and very often mouthing affectionately Hank's hands or shoulders.

"Now come over here," he said leading the way to a low wooden platform, "till I see about those legs and hoofs. I've gone over your back and sides pretty well."

She followed him obediently, then turned her head in the direction of the house.

"Who's coming?" said Hank. "Oh! 'Tilda — what do you want, sissy?"

'Tilda Jane had not taken off her coat and hat, and her expression was so dubious that Hank paused in his work, and stood staring at her, his brush in one hand, the curry comb in the other.

"Your face is queer," he said penetratingly, "you seem kind of interested, and sorry, and frightened of what I'll say — 'pon my word, you look just like those dear sweet women who come round the mill collecting about every other day in the week — 'Gentlemen, for the love of charity, won't you give us something for the home for aged men and women, or the new tower on the city hall, or the monument being erected to our worthy townsman who so ably represented his native State in the halls of legislature, or the new library for the scientific souls of the town, or the repairing of the old road out to the cemetery' — now, 'Tilda, I don't care a rap for the cemetery, or science, or halls of legislature, or monuments, or old men and women. Get in the house with you, and let me finish my work."

"Hank," said 'Tilda Jane, imploringly, and stepping a little nearer to him.

"You haven't rubbers on, and the yard is muddy," said Hank feebly.

Still 'Tilda Jane did not pay any attention to him. "What under the sun is in the girl's mind?" he said desperately. "There she is sinking ankle-deep into soft State of Maine mud, which I am proud to say is ahead of any other mud in the world. Oh! despair and condemnation!" he exclaimed suddenly clapping his hands to his pockets, "she wants something for herself, and I haven't got any money to lend her, and I won't do her any favours. Go 'way, sissy."

"Hank," said the little girl, pleadingly, "don't be gay — please listen — you remember when Perletta came home three weeks ago?"

"I remember nothing about Perletta," said Hank stubbornly, for it was one of his pleasant fictions to treat Perletta as a thing of the past. "I remember hiring a new girl three weeks ago of the same name."

"Well, the new girl, then," said 'Tilda Jane in a low voice.

"By the way, where is she?" asked Hank, looking over his shoulder, "she's a powerful listener."

"I sent her to town for more tea. She forgot to tell me we were out of it — Well, Hank dear, you admit that Perletta has been pretty good the last three weeks."

"The new girl has behaved herself with some

decency," Hank admitted reluctantly. "Don't praise her, or she'll shy."

"A week ago, she asked me if we would mind if she had a little pet of her own," continued 'Tilda Jane. "I thought by the way she spoke she meant a canary, and I said I didn't think you'd mind. She said it would make her feel more contented — that you had Milkweed and the cow, and I had the hens, and the pigeons, and sparrows and the dogs, and grampa had the pup, and she had nothing."

"Poor neglected creature!" said Hank, ironically.

"I forgot to speak to you about it," said 'Tilda Jane, "I didn't think much of it, but do you know just now when I came home, she told me she'd got not one pet, but two."

"She had, had she," remarked Hank, "two birds in a cage?"

"They're not birds exactly," said the little girl, "but oh! Hank, I hope you'll let her keep them. Her face was just lovely as she bent over them."

"Where are they?"

"In the wood-house."

"I'll go see them," said Hank promptly.

"Wait a bit, brother," said 'Tilda Jane, laying a hand on his arm. "You know Perletta, our new girl, is queer, but she is beautiful with children or animals."

"Is she?" said Hank, "that's nothing to her credit, most women are."

"But Hank, she's so odd in other ways. This seems to make her catch up to the nice people who are smooth and even to get on with — You know Mrs. Melançon has a new baby — "

"Really that woman is incorrigible," remarked Hank, lifting his face to the sky, "this must be the fiftieth."

"It's only the tenth," said 'Tilda Jane, indignantly. "Well, when Perletta and I went in to see the little new thing, a few days ago, her face was just like an angel's when she looked at it."

"I wish I'd been there," said Hank, enthusiastically.

"Now," continued 'Tilda Jane, "when Perletta bent over the tub where her new pets are, her face looked just the same way that it did when she saw the baby."

"Tub!" exclaimed Hank, "are they fish?"

"No," said the little girl with a sigh, "I wish they were."

"Lobsters," pursued Hank, "crabs, shrimps, jellyfish, turtles, sea-lions, seals, porpoises — "

"Oh! stop, stop," said 'Tilda Jane imploringly, "do be sober."

"I can't," replied Hank, hilariously, "the spring's in my blood, and I'm in good health, and I haven't

got any debts — All on board for the fast express for the house, on an excursion to see Hobbledehoy's new pets," and, seizing 'Tilda Jane by the hand, he rushed her to the back door.

Half laughing, half disturbed, the little girl went with him.

Far in the wood-house, in the full light of the setting sun streaming in the window, was a large wash-tub with a bit of wire netting laid across it, and, on top of the netting, a heavy stick of wood.

Hank fell back in pretended dismay. "Is it a bear, 'Tilda?" he whispered.

"No, no," she said hysterically. "Now Hank, be prepared, don't laugh or scream — you'll make me nervous."

Hank paid no attention to her. With as many antics as a schoolboy, he alternately advanced and retreated, touched the end of the stick of wood with timid fingers, scuttled back if it moved, and finally with a great effort, and stiffening his rotund figure, he marched up, removed stick and screen, and stood right over the tub.

In spite of 'Tilda Jane's warnings, he gave one loud yell of delight, when he saw what was inside, and then raced out the back door and round and round the house, roaring at intervals, "I thought I was twenty-five — I'm only fifteen — I'm made a

boy again just for to-night. Oh! Pigs! Pigs! Pigs in clover!"

'Tilda Jane stood in the doorway, laughing convulsively; then she grew anxious, as Hank tore round and round the house in his long rubber boots, the mud splashing almost to his neck. The sociable Milkweed, who loved to be with human beings, and who was herself young and somewhat foolish, and also full of play, took to galloping after him, and Poacher, witnessing the commotion, ran from the stable, and, not to be behindhand in any family rejoicing, leaped and bounded beside Hank.

Grampa, hearing the noise in the yard, hobbled to the back door, and the pup, breaking away from him, joined the chase, coming in at the tail of it, and, unlike the serious Poacher who did not open his mouth, the little aristocrat, for the second time in his young life, gave utterance to shrill, and wildly joyful yelps.

"Stop, sir, I say," called grampa to his son, who was now taking in the barn as well as the house in his wide circles. "Stop this, I say. It's disgraceful to see a grown man with a horse and dogs chasing him. Hold up, will you!" and he shook a crutch at him. "If that mare stumbles, the pup will be right under her hoofs — and look at the mud she's dashing on herself, and you fresh from grooming her. You're all crazy — I never saw such

a sight — 'Tilda Jane, get that pup, will you? He'll catch cold — see, he's as dirty as a pig already."

"Hank," squealed 'Tilda Jane in her piercing, young voice, "do stop, grampa's getting scared."

She timed this information just as Hank came round the corner of the barn by the hen-house, and, with a comprehensive glance, he took in the family party, and abruptly wheeled into the stable door, followed by Milkweed and the dogs.

'Tilda Jane hurried after him, rescued the struggling, dripping Handy Andy, and carried him into the kitchen, where he speedily had a bath by the fire.

Hank came in a short time later, calm, and in his right mind.

"You're getting rather too old to play the fool," said grampa sarcastically.

"Have you seen Perletta's pets, sir?" inquired Hank with a wink at 'Tilda Jane.

"Perletta — who's Perletta — oh! the girl," said grampa fretfully, and with a sudden fit of deafness. "I don't know anything about her. I can't hear you. Don't talk to me."

Ever since the return of the wayward girl, grampa had steadily ignored her. He never addressed her, and if she spoke to him, he did not answer her. If he wished anything he could not get himself, he waited until 'Tilda Jane or Hank could

come to him. This was his punishment for her running away. By and by, he would restore her to favour, but there was no hurry about it.

Hank, seeing his father was in no humour for talking, crept out to the wood-house, where 'Tilda Jane followed him. He had once again removed the stick of wood, and the netting that 'Tilda Jane had replaced, and stood staring down at the two tiny pink and white pigs lying on sweet clover hay.

He was shaking with silent laughter, but presently he controlled himself enough to say, "Where did she get them?"

"You know Perletta often goes among the French people," the little girl replied, "and old farmer Thibideau's wife told her she might have these two young pigs if she cared to bring them up. The old mother had too big a litter to take care of — are they hard to raise, Hank?"

"Law no, I've often seen the farmers' wives in the country with them. There's no trick about bringing them up, but they take time like all young things fed by hand. You've got to attend to them several times a day, and once or twice in the night when they are as young as this. They ain't too bad looking when they're young, are they?"

"I think they're cute," said 'Tilda Jane, "they're so small and clean looking, and so quiet."

"Wait a bit," replied Hank with an explosive

chuckle, "wait a bit before you talk of quietness — How is the new girl going to feed them?"

"She's going to buy a baby's nursing bottle while she's down town. Mrs. Thibideau told her she could feed them with a spoon, but the bottle is easier — Here she is now."

At that instant, Perletta, red-faced and out of breath, entered the back door, holding two parcels tightly in her hands. With pleading looks she scanned Hank's face. There was a pleasant protecting expression in her eyes, quite different from the sullen one she usually exhibited, and the young man, who at heart was truly kind, and appreciative of any effort at reform, gave a slight nod, and, turning on his heel, re-entered the kitchen.

Grampa, when he saw Perletta coming, hitched himself into the dining-room, and the girl bustled round the room, taking off her wraps, and then hurrying to wash the bottle, and fill it with milk and water with a dash of molasses.

"Kin I feed the boys afore I gets the supper?" she said civilly to 'Tilda Jane.

The little girl smiled assent, and started preparations for the meal herself.

Perletta, clasping the warm bottle, ran to the wood-house, hurriedly took one of the little pigs from the tub, and put the bottle to his mouth. He seized the rubber mouthpiece with avidity, and with

as much ease as if he had always been accustomed to get his food in this way. After pulling away at it for a few seconds, he would stop, and violently knead Perletta's knuckles with his tiny snout.

Meantime his little brother awoke, and discovered by nosing about the hay that he had been deprived of his companion. Listening intently, he heard sounds of enjoyment above. With great intelligence, he concluded that feeding time was going on without him, and he uplifted his baby voice in a succession of ear-piercing yells.

'Tilda Jane ran to shut the door into the kitchen, but the mischief had been done. Grampa, dozing by the dining-room fire, had sprung from his chair, and, his deafness forgotten, was calling frantically to Hank, to know who was being killed.

"Come and see, sir," said Hank, and, taking him by the arm, he led him to the wood-house door.

There sat Perletta, confused by the din, and yet comforted by the thought that she was in the pursuit of her duty. But for her, these young things might starve to death.

"Try the other one," shouted Hank, in the midst of the uproar. "Diogenes of the tub is jealous."

Perletta, immensely flattered to think that Hank had permitted her to keep her pets, and that he was beginning to take an interest in them, at once

dropped the pig on her lap to the tub, and lifted out his brother.

Now she had given offence in another direction. The dropped pig knew the sweets of the bottle, while the other had only guessed at them, and he yelled much more loudly than his brother had done.

"Pigs," spluttered grampa, "pigs in my house — Have I sunk as low as that? Are we going to have troughs in the dining-room?"

"No, sir," bawled Hank, consolingly, "not a bit of it. Just wait till these fellows are a trifle older, and we'll clear them out to the barn."

The old man saw that his son's mind was made up to keep the little creatures, so he wisely did not protest, but went back to his seat, and sat till supper time, muttering, "Pigs, pigs, I didn't think I'd come to this!"

Perletta was in a seventh heaven of delight. Now at last she had something of her own to care for, and day by day, and night by night, she fed the young and growing creatures at stated intervals.

"She's pretty good too," 'Tilda Jane said to Hank. "No matter how cold it is, she gets up twice every night, and heats some milk for them."

"Tell her to get up only once a night," said Hank commandingly, "that's enough now."

'Tilda Jane did as she was told, but the first night the order went into effect they were all

awakened at midnight by a terrible noise, and heart-rending yells from the kitchen and staircase.

Perletta had inadvertently left the wood-house door ajar, and when she did not appear at the first of her accustomed times, the two pigs, by their united efforts, succeeded in forcing the cover off the tub, and had come into the kitchen where they were trying to get up the staircase in search of their guardian and protector. Their shrieks of dismay and anger, as they tried to mount the steps and fell backward, were enough, not only to alarm the house, but the neighbourhood. Grampa, whose room was near the staircase, was almost crazy. His pup had waked up, and was screaming and barking with fright. Poacher, and even deaf Gippie, who had also been disturbed in their slumbers, had sprung up, and the half blind and lame Gippie kept getting in the way of the pigs, receiving pushing blows with their young snouts that made him call out in wrath — he whose old age usually saved him from punishment from anyone; while good, faithful Poacher, taking the part of a sheep-dog, was trying to herd the unruly members of the household back to their appointed place.

"Catch them," shouted grampa, hoarsely, "catch the evil things, Hank, Tilda, where are you? Don't you hear the noise? — The pup has most lost his senses — there he goes out of the bed.

Those wild hogs will kill him. Hand me my crutches someone — Oh! that viper — why did I let her back in my house?"

The pigs would neither be led nor driven by Poacher, and not until Hank, 'Tilda Jane, and Perletta appeared on the scene, could they be controlled in any way. Hank arrived first, but he could do nothing single-handed, for as fast as he cornered them, they would run under his arms. His candle went out, and choking and spluttering with laughter, for he could not for his life help seeing the amusing side of a situation, he had to search for a lamp, and grope for matches, trying meanwhile to calm his father.

"The pup's all right, dad. I hear him squealing under the stove. The boys didn't hurt him — merely gave him a push or two. Wait a bit, till I get the matches. As soon as night comes, every match in this house grows another leg, and dances away into a corner. I never can find any. There now, I have a light. Hold on till I set it up on a shelf, out of the way of the boys — Perletta," he bawled up the stairway, "can't you earthquake yourself downstairs, and catch these pink and white posies of yours? You understand them better than anybody."

In a few seconds, Perletta and 'Tilda Jane came clattering down the steps, and together they man-

aged to seize the pigs, and carry them to their home in the tub, and also to pacify the disturbed dogs.

The puppy's eyes under the stove looked green with fright and anger, and when they tried to catch him, he bolted into grampa's room, and sprang on the bed where he lay trembling.

"Go 'way," cried grampa, "leave us alone — and put those hogs out-of-doors."

"All right, dad," said Hank, who was standing looking at him, shading the light with his hand. "Go to sleep now, those boys shall go right out to the barn — Perletta," he called, "where are you?"

"Here, sir," she replied, appearing in the woodhouse door, her dishevelled hair almost standing on end with fright and worry.

"We've got to put those pigs in the barn," said Hank. "'Tilda, you light the lantern, and we'll move the tub."

A queer procession wound out-of-doors, and, as they went, Hank said to Perletta, "These fellows are getting to be a good size. You feed them after this late at night, and first thing in the morning. I'm not going to have you coming out here in my barn in the middle of the night with a lantern. First thing you know, one of those

rowdies will knock it over, and then we shall have a fire."

Perletta's face fell, but she uttered a meek, "Yes, sir," and 'Tilda Jane hastened to say, "I'll come out with you every night before we go to bed. I think it is lovely in you to be so merciful to these bothersome little things."

"It's what you do yourself," said Perletta bluntly, "you gets up in the dead of the night if a dog or a bird wants anythin'."

"Yes," replied 'Tilda Jane, softly, "but somehow or other, it seems more blessed to do things for pigs than other creatures."

Hank smirked at the occupants of the tub as he set it down in a corner of his harness-room. "That's so, 'Tilda, and there's more merit in doing things for human pigs than for angelic humans — Now Perletta, you keep your boys in this little room. There's a button on the door, and no one will come in. Father's an old man, and I don't want him bothered with these things in the house."

"Sir," cried Perletta in dismay, as a sudden thought struck her, "you ain't a-goin' to make me send 'em away when they're bigger, be you?"

'Tilda Jane swung the lantern round so that she could see the face of her adopted brother. Hank

was fond of fun, and was disposed to be frivolous at times, but there was a strong undercurrent of sense in his disposition, and just now, as he threw a glance at their unprepossessing maid, and then looked beyond her out through the barn door at the bright solemn beauty of the sky, his face was aglow with kind and manly feeling.

"Perletta," he said slowly, "I believe in a power away up there behind the stars that made all things, even the flies that you brush from your kitchen. I hate to see a critter hungry, or cold, or sad, or neglected. I believe the good Lord made even pigs, and I'm going to stand by these fellows, if they don't get too obstreperous. By and by, when they're older, I'll make them a good, warm house in the corner of the yard. Every animal ought to have his own bed and board, and pigs ain't dirty. They're as clean as anyone. It's dirty people, that don't keep them clean, that give pigs their bad name."

"And you'll never kill 'em sir, oh! say you'll never kill 'em," cried Perletta, clasping her big hands in frantic appeal.

Hank scratched his touzled head. "Let's leave that problem to the future. Pigs get to be powerful big, but I'm something like the Irishman who always kept the same pig. He said he'd got to have one, and he didn't believe in being fickle —

I promise you Perletta, that nothing will be done to these young fellows without your permission."

Perletta gasped excited thanks, then as Hank and 'Tilda Jane walked to the house, she lingered an instant, to tuck her pets in their hay, and give them a last caress.

" 'Tilda," said Hank in a low voice, " I prophesy that in a few weeks we'll have two promising young hogs running about these premises, with blue ribbons round their necks."

CHAPTER XIX

GRAMPA'S DREAM

HANK'S prediction came true, but not just in the way he thought it would. Dodge and Grappler, as Perletta called her two pets — Dodge being her adaptation of Diogenes, and Grappler a playful allusion to a fighting propensity — became in time two fine-looking, prosperous shotes, and at an exhibition held in Ciscasset, bore off the prize awarded to young hogs.

Perletta's joy was ludicrous, but it was also touching, and after one look at her ecstatic face, as she stood surveying her two blue-ribboned and admired pets in the little country fair, Hank registered a mental vow not to bereave her of the creatures she loved so dearly.

They were only pigs, but they were her pigs, and, owing to their upbringing, they had developed a most peculiar pig originality. They were the worst pigs that ever lived, Hank declared. By feeding one at a time, and making the other wait, they had become very pugnacious with each

other, and with Perletta, and three-sided fights in the back yard were of frequent occurrence. Now they were, of course, old enough to feed themselves, but for a long time, Perletta had patiently attended to them one at a time in the little harness-room.

While she presented the bottle to one, the other would bite her feet and butt against her knees, until Hank, discovering her one day undergoing this martyrdom, got a rope, so that she could attach one pig to the wall by the hind leg, while feeding the other.

This made no difference in the pigs' feelings toward Perletta. They bore her a steady grudge, though, at the same time, they had more attachment for her than for any other person. They were also jealous of each other, and beat and punished each other continually, though they were never happy apart.

Perletta, who was as strong as a man, had herself made a pen in the back yard for them, and Hank had built a small house, but their intelligence and perversity were so great that they were rarely in this enclosure. They would work their way out, no matter how many obstacles were presented to them, and, strangely enough, reverted to a wild type, preferring to make their own beds, rather than to sleep in the soft one provided for

them. Their favourite lair was at the back of the garden, in a tangle of currant bushes and lilacs, and they could be seen frequently running from the barn with their mouths full of straw to replenish this lair. They slept late in the morning, but about breakfast time would appear at the back door, clamouring for the nice warm breakfast Perletta always had ready for them.

After breakfast, they crossed the road, and went down to the river, where they wallowed in the soft mud, coming back at noon for another meal, and to see whether the dogs had left any bones about the yard for them to nose over.

Though they fought each other constantly, they never quarrelled with the dogs, and even the puppy lost his fear of them, and if they presumed to steal one of his bones, would snatch it from them. Occasionally, the pigs took it into their heads to make calls, and urgent messages would come to Perletta from some neighbouring house, that her pigs were in the yard, and would not get out.

Arming herself with a broom, she would go in search of them, and with mutual snarling, snapping, and recrimination would guide them toward their home.

'Tilda Jane was kind and forbearing with the new household pets, and would feed them in Per-

letta's absence, but Hank took an amused and constant interest in them. So curious did he become with regard to the habits of the genus *sus,* that he bought a large natural history, and devoted evening after evening to reading aloud from it, to anyone who would listen to him. 'Tilda Jane was usually busy with her lessons, so it fell to his father to become chief auditor.

Hank soon became an expert with respect to the different types of pigs, domesticated and wild — large-bodied, big-eared English breeds with convex backs, small-bodied, short-eared Chinese breeds with concave backs, dwarf pigs, river hogs, Indian wild pigs, French short-tusked pigs, but most of all he read over and over again, accounts of the doings of the long-legged, large-headed, and thin-bodied greyhound pigs of Old Ireland.

One bright, spring evening, immediately after supper, he sat in the dining-room with his natural history in hand, while his father listened to him from his arm-chair opposite.

"Just think, dad," Hank was exclaiming, "what simpletons some folks are, to say that any critter has no sense. Here it tells that pigs are intelligent if you treat 'em right, and that their scent is fine. I believe that's so, for I've seen our two track Perletta."

Grampa said nothing, and Hank went on, "This book says one man had a pig he trained to stand to game, as steady as the best bred pointer."

"Do you calculate," asked grampa, dryly, "to let those two hogs rampage all over our garden this coming summer? The weather is getting warmer. It will soon be time to stir up the ground, and we've always had something of a plot."

"This year, dad," said Hank, "I allowed to buy our vegetables, and let the pigs snout up the garden all they like. 'Twill do the ground good to rest, and the dogs and Milkweed will have a chance to stretch their legs. What would puppy, there, do with a garden?" and he pointed to Handy Andy who lay stretched out in his red plush chair.

Grampa hesitated a few instants, then he said huskily, "Mr. Waysmith will soon be taking him away — in fact 'tis his last night with us. He wants to send him to Boston."

Hank's face fell, but he said nothing, and stared at the dog. By this time, the little brindled animal had grown to be a handsome young dog. His big head was lighted by a pair of brilliant and eloquent eyes that bespoke a somewhat chastened and disciplined puppy nature. He did not perform half the mischievous tricks of a few months

ago, but he was by no means a model character yet, as a large hole in the plastering in grampa's room testified.

Hank had discovered it an hour before, as he went to get a thinner coat for his father, and, when he mildly remarked upon it, grampa had said testily, "Never mind — never mind — it's where the dog gets his lime."

"He looks like Muffles," remarked Hank at last, "but even better looking. Finer somehow, perhaps from his house upbringing."

"Of course that's it," said grampa shortly, "the dog book says that raising pups in large kennels restricts brain development, for they lead a routine life. This dog has been brought up like a child."

"So he has, dad, and you ought to be proud of him — you and 'Tilda, for you've raised him between you, though I guess you've had the heft of the work."

"'Tilda Jane has fussed about his food, and I've kept him warm nights," said grampa. "He'll miss us — I misdoubt taking him away. I don't like it — he's too young."

"Maybe Mr. Waysmith is going to bring him back again," suggested Hank.

"I don't know — I don't know," replied grampa bitterly. "That's the way with things in this

world. Change and decay — I'm breaking up. I feel it."

"Don't say that, dad," replied Hank uneasily. "Why, you haven't been as smart for years as you have been this winter and spring. You're just a little down in the mouth on account of the pup's going away."

"*I* down in the mouth," repeated grampa indignantly, "and on account of a pup. Get out, boy, you're taking liberties."

Hank closed his book, and got up, muttering to himself, "It's funny, but it's mostly the bare solemn truth that hurts in this life. Half the truth don't offend." Then he said aloud, "All right, dad — all right. I feel cranky myself to-night, and something seems to tell me that I'm going to die young — must be 'cause sissy's gone out and left us. She goes so seldom."

"Young girls should stay at home," said grampa in a crabbed voice, "I don't believe in gadding."

"Well, I guess I'll go feed the stock," said Hank stretching out his fat arms, "and, by the way, I mustn't forget to give 'Tilda's pigeon some hemp. That was a cute trick of little Housetop's yesterday, dad, wasn't it?"

Grampa's face softened. "Yes it was. I like birds."

Hank went out through the kitchen to the back

yard, where he shaded his eyes with his hand, and looked up toward 'Tilda Jane's window.

Yesterday, her little dark pet Housetop, who had got into the habit of flying in and out of her room, had brought another pigeon with him to the window sill. The strange pigeon, though one of those accustomed to feed about the yard, would not enter the house, so Housetop, with many pleading coos, and bowing prettily, had given his young mistress to understand that he had chosen a little mate, and as she would not come in his room he did not know what to do about a nest.

'Tilda Jane had run downstairs and reported the matter to Hank, who told her that it would be better to move Housetop's box outside the window. He had accordingly fastened the capacious cracker box on a shelf near the window ledge, and now the two pigeons were flying busily back and forth from the barn, carrying straws to add to the already luxurious nest 'Tilda Jane had provided for them.

"Seems as if they want to do something to help," said Hank, and passing Perletta, who was vigorously brushing one of the pigs, being rewarded by grunts and snaps of disapproval, he went to get an evening meal for the birds and hens.

"Guess I'll give them buckwheat to-night," he murmured, "feathered folk like a change in diet

as well as humans. Land! how we miss sissy. It's wholesome for her to get out once in a coon's age, but she leaves a powerful blank — Women and girls have a lot in their power," he went on, as he mechanically pursued his way into the barn. "Now it don't seem as if 'Tilda Jane was of much account in the world, but she makes a home, and there are millions of homes to be made, and if the home ain't made right, nothing goes right. Women are the home-keepers — What can the smartest man do toward getting his breakfast? If the coffee is cold, and the toast burnt, and the mush sour, he goes out in the world with a load on his stomach, and wrath in his heart. That wrath's got to be poured on someone, and it's all some woman's fault. I rate a cook high. Cooks keep the peace of the world. Who's going to fight on smooth victuals? I believe brotherly love starts in the pantry. I'm a better man since I stopped having dyspepsy. Greasy fodder used to make me hate everyone by spells. Now I love all men, and especially all women — Yes, Milkweed, I'm a-coming. Good old girl — you'll whinny your lungs out, if you don't take care — No, biddies, 'Tilda ain't here. You needn't cackle for her. I'm going to be your provider for to-night."

'Tilda Jane, in the meantime, accompanied by Poacher and Gippie, who had received a special

invitation, had gone to spend the afternoon and evening and night with the Tracys — the two good persons who had advised her what to do when she first came to Ciscasset, and grampa treated her unkindly. In Hank's absence, they had been warm friends and safe counsellors, and now, at intervals in the little girl's busy life, they took her to their own home for as long a time as she would stay.

Of the three members of the household, grampa missed her most, though he said least about her absence.

"He's as dull as a beetle," Hank muttered an hour later, as he sat staring at him. "Dad, you look tuckered out. Don't you want to go to bed?"

"Yes, I guess I'll go," said the old man getting up. "You'll mind and put the blower on the stove, so the sparks won't fly out."

"Yes sir," replied Hank, and he got up to open the door for his father and the pup who was frolicking round him, loth to go to bed so early.

"Come, sir," said grampa sternly, "none of your nonsense," and he pushed Handy Andy with his crutch, yet at the same time, his face softened. Where would his pet be at this time to-morrow night?

Hank sighed as the bed-room door closed on his father. "If the old man wasn't so smart in his mind, I'd say he was in his dotage. Think of

hating dogs till most eighty, and then turning a somersault right in the middle of indulging them."

Grampa could not sleep well. He lay awake for hours, and at last fell, not into a light dozing slumber, but into a heavy, dream-haunted sleep that did not rest him.

He thought that he was a boy again, hunting wildcats. There they went through the woods to the swamp where their prey the rabbits abounded. He could see the boys and the dogs running gleefully after them. Now he and his hound Trip had singled out a wildcat. It went up a tree, but Trip went too. He was the one dog in the farming community that could climb a tree, provided a fence were near by to enable him to spring up among the branches.

In the meantime, poor grampa in his dream, felt his strength giving out. He fell on the soft moss, and the wildcat, pursued by the hound, leaped from the tree to his breast. He could feel it tearing and scratching at his throat. Would it kill him, or would good dog Trip descend from the tree in time to save him? He would try to help himself, and he put a feeble hand to his throat. He could not push the wildcat away. With deadly celerity it was nipping and tearing his garments. Soon it would reach the tender flesh.

With a supreme effort, he roused himself, and

seized the wildcat by the throat. He would kill it, and he was just beginning to shake it violently, when he awoke, and discovered fortunately that the wildcat in his grasp had been changed into the petted pup, Handy Andy.

CHAPTER XX

THE SON OF MUFFLES

The old man had been sleeping in such a profound, though disturbed way, that it took him a few seconds to recover himself. He lay puffing and panting for breath, with only sense enough to relax his hold on the struggling dog whose young eyes were starting from his head.

While he lay trying to come out of his dazed condition, he suddenly became aware of a changed state of the atmosphere. He could not get his breath, for the air was surcharged with smoke.

He was now wide awake, and his brain moved with the rapidity of younger days. The house was on fire — the little dog with the strange instinct of protection belonging to dogdom, had roused him, and his duty done, now lay quietly on his chest. He knew that his master was awake. A quick, glad thought flashed through the old man's excited brain. The small animal had done his duty, and had got rid of responsibility. Now he was

waiting — waiting even for death, should grampa choose to remain. How faithful were dumb creatures — more faithful sometimes than animals of a higher order.

Grampa did not stop to pursue this line of thought. Without a movement toward his crutches, he sprang out of bed and stumbled to the door. He opened it, then slammed it together violently. Hall and kitchen were full of blinding smoke. Coughing and choking, he hurried to the open window, flung it up higher, and threw cracked yells of appeal out on the still night air, "Fire! Fire! Help! Help!"

He could get out the window, for he was on the ground floor, but he reflected that he would probably break a leg in so doing, and if he waited, Hank would be sure to come to him. Hank's room was right over his, 'Tilda Jane's was nearer the front of the house.

"Hank! Hank! Son! Son!" he cried, "wake up — the house is on fire."

There was no response from Hank, and, seizing the large bell from the side of his bed, grampa rang it out the window with all his might.

Soon he could see the Melançons coming through the darkness, tumbling and hopping over each other, looking like white and striped rabbits in their bed attire. One of the boys ran to give the

alarm in the town, and father and mother Melançon assisted grampa out the window.

"The dog first," he said, when they held out their hands to him, "he saved my life."

"Wake Hank, oh wake Hank!" he called to the Melançon children, who forthwith began to execute a dance of an excited and hilarious character under their neighbour's window, and to bombard him with stones, and any missiles they could lay their hands on.

"And Perletta," grampa added, "the girl sleeps like a log."

Mrs. Melançon ran to assail Perletta's window vigorously with gravel and sticks, and soon her touzled head appeared.

"Tell her to run to the back of the wood-house attic," called grampa, "and come down the rough steps, she can't get through the kitchen."

Perletta did as she was told, but Hank was in a quandary. "Front hall full of smoke, also back," he bawled down. "I'm going to jump on my bed," and forthwith he began to hurl mattress, bedclothes, and his summer and winter garments out the window. When he thought he had made a heap sufficiently soft, he put a foot on the sill, gave a leap, and alighted without accident. The house was not high, and the risk in jumping was consequently small.

Arrived on the ground, he flashed a comprehensive glance at his father, the pup, and Perletta, and said, "Every living thing is out, I guess."

"Except sissy's pigeon," said grampa.

"That's so," replied Hank, "the creature must be dazed by all this confusion, and the smoke is puffing round its box now."

With amazing rapidity for a fat man, he ran to the barn, and returned with a ladder of medium size. Placing it against the wall of the house, he hurried up, detached the pigeon box, carried it down, and, placing it on one side, threw some clothes over it. "Otherwise, the frightened creatures might flutter out," he muttered.

"Now, friends," he shouted, "let's see if we can save any stuff that isn't alive — but no risks, mind."

By this time, the dining-room, kitchen, and grampa's bed-room were burning swiftly, and Hank called out, "No use trying to get in there. Perletta, you and Mr. Melançon run to the back, and see if you can snake anything out of the wood-house — Mrs. Melançon and the children come with me. I guess I'll rescue a few things from the front of the house."

The night fortunately was not dark, and the flames were now beginning to illuminate the yard and garden. As the front door was locked on

the inside, Hank smashed a window, jumped in, and soon was passing out the haircloth furniture. 'Tilda Jane's sewing-machine was here, also some books, and other treasured possessions placed in the best room to keep them out of Handy Andy's way.

"Blisters! it's getting hot here," muttered Hank, who with perspiration pouring down his face, was flinging things about. "I guess I'll have to quit. These wooden houses blaze up like match boxes," and with a leap he dodged a long tongue of flame coming in through the doorway, and landed on the grass outside.

"Here's the fire engine," shouted the Melançon children as he once more appeared among them.

"Much good it will do," growled Hank. "They can't save anything but the cellar now."

A crowd of half dressed men and boys were running beside the engine, and Hank soon had two or three score of willing helpers. "There's nothing to be done," he said to the chief of the fire department, "but play some water on if you want to. The place is doomed — the nearest hydrant is over there in front of the next house."

The man saw that his assistants had already found the hydrant, and with a backward glance at them, he said to Hank, "There's no danger of the barn going, is there?"

"No siree," replied Hank, "I took good care to have it a ways off — never did see the sense of having a house and a barn clapped close together. Thank fortune, there ain't a breath of wind to-night — There goes the attic — old boxes and childhood's toys! Well I, for one, ain't bound to rags and reminiscences. I'll build another house."

"There's mighty heap money goes up in flames every yeah in this country," said Mr. Melançon drawing near, and speaking to Hank, "'tis terrible."

"Yes, terrible," muttered Hank, "it's such dead loss."

"Got any insurance?" asked his neighbour.

"Some — not much, not nearly enough to cover the loss. I never foresaw this — well, I must skip to the barn. That mare of mine will be fair crazy with all this row," and he hurried away.

The little house was now one brilliant bonfire. The flames sprang high. Never before had it looked such a good size, and so picturesque. The dancing light cast strange shadows over the yard and stable, and the faces of the on-lookers. It was not a pleasing spectacle, but it was curiously fascinating.

"'Pon my soul," snickered one of the firemen who was standing with a hose in his hand, directing a stream of water in the middle of the pit of

flame, "Look over yonder — funny spectators those."

His companion stared in the direction of the clump of shrubbery behind the house.

There side by side, quietly contemplating the fire, were two large white pigs. They neither advanced nor retreated, but presently, when Perletta spied them, and walked up to caress them, they impatiently twitched their short tails, grunted, and tossed up their heads, then walked back into the darkness.

"I've heard tell they were great folks for animals in this house," said the first man, "and when I sees two pigs running to a fire like two Christians, I believes it."

"They say it was a dog give the alarm," responded the other.

"That's nothing new — dogs has saved lots of property and lives, and cats, too, for that matter. Our smell ain't in it with theirs, and something seems to tell them what's coming."

"Now how did this house catch on fire?" grampa was saying to Hank who had walked out of the stable with his arm round Milkweed's neck.

"I found her shivering and scared to death," Hank remarked, "and I thought that with hosses, like humans, suspense was worse than knowledge,

so I brought her out. See — she ain't so bad now," and he patted her quivering neck.

"Horses hate fire," said his father.

"Well, dad, about the starting of it," Hank continued. "I'm up a tree. The dining-room fire was most dead out when I went to bed. The kitchen stove was going, for Perletta had been baking late, but all the covers was on. We ain't had any fire in the hall stove since the warm spring weather began. It beats me."

"Were there any matches lying round?" asked grampa.

"We never used no sulphurs," interposed Perletta eagerly, as she came closer to them. "They was all parlour matches."

"Perhaps bad flue," suggested Mrs. Melançon.

"I guess that must have been it," said Hank, dejectedly. "The chimneys weren't well built. When father put up this house, he was cheated by a fellow that he thought wouldn't cheat. Most nights I go round upstairs to feel the woodwork, but I didn't think of it last night. How we get fooled. You suffer, and the other fellow gets the money."

"In this poor worl'," said Mrs. Melançon softly, "in another 'twill be made up."

"Yes, but it's a powerful long time to wait," said Hank. "If I had the arranging of things,

I'd give all my object lessons in this life. According to me, sinners have the good times here, and saints sweat."

The Frenchwoman smiled a benignant, angelic smile, then she said sweetly, "And now let us think of your poor fathah. This is shocking for him. Suppose he comes and entahs into one of our nice, warm beds. Two children will gladly turn out for him — Mr. Hank, did you know 'twas the deah dog that woke your fathah?"

"No," said Hank sharply, "was it?"

"Yes," and Mrs. Melançon told him that grampa had related his wildcat dream to her.

Hank uttered another astonished exclamation, then said, "I won't speak to him about it to-night. He's pretty well worked up — I'm a hundred times obliged to you for taking him in. Dad, will you go home with our kind neighbour?" Grampa turned with a start from his contemplation of the fire.

"Where are your crutches?" asked Hank.

"He threw them out on the grass," said Mrs. Melançon, when grampa did not reply, "boys, look for them."

Grampa, without waiting for the crutches to be found, started off with a firm step toward Mrs. Melançon's house.

"Look at that," cried Hank. "I've heard of

such things before. Rheumatism can be shocked out of the blood by some accident like a railway collision, or an earthquake, or a fire, but I should think dad would be too old for it."

"It is in his old age that your fathah makes change," said Mrs. Melançon softly.

"That's true," replied Hank, "and it shows that while there's life, there's hope. Now I must go thank the men for coming from town with the engine. I see they're getting ready to go home."

"I will follow your fathah," said Mrs. Melançon, taking the crutches from one of her boys. "You and Perletta will come when you like."

"You can take her now," said Hank over his shoulder, "I'm going to stay right here to-night."

"Then come to breakfast," said his kind neighbour, and, going up to the staring, gaping Perletta, who had scarcely opened her mouth since the fire began, she led her away with her.

In an hour the place was deserted by all human beings save Hank. He sat on the little raised platform in the yard where he groomed Milkweed, and where 'Tilda Jane and Perletta brushed clothes and shook rugs.

Grimy and dishevelled, he surveyed the smoking ruins of his home. "A good chance to be cast down," he soliloquized. "I've not money enough to build a new house, and I don't know

anyone that would lend it to me, except at a sky rate of interest, but I ain't going to worry. Sho! — what's a burnt house to what some men have to go through — Here you Milkweed, stop puffing and blowing over my shoulder. That fire ain't going to hurt you now. Come on to your stall — Pigs, go back to your lair," and he addressed the two curious animals who had again emerged from the shades of the garden, after the crowd went away, and were standing staring at him.

" 'Pon my words, if you treat animals half way decent, they want to hang on to your coat tails all the time — " he continued, " well, I'm in need of comfort from someone or something — there was a lot here. I believe most folks enjoy a fire, if it ain't their own house that's burning. I usually like running to a fire, myself; but somehow or other, I didn't seem to enjoy this one — What was it I was reading to dad the other night — something about the most of us getting a lot of consolation out of the troubles of our friends. — Pigs, didn't I tell you to go to bed? You ain't going to impose on me, if I am a half ruined man — Stop nosing my best clothes. You'd like to lie on that thirty dollar overcoat, would you? — I guess I've saved most of my things. A pity I couldn't get into sissy's room — ain't I glad she

wasn't here — good sissy. Now I'll carry all this stuff in the barn, and then lie down on the hay for a spell. The dawn's just breaking, and I am a grown man, not a fool of a boy. I must quit repining."

CHAPTER XXI

'TILDA JANE RECEIVES A SHOCK

VERY early the next morning, 'Tilda Jane came trotting from the town with Poacher at her heels, and behind him, the three-legged Gippie, puffing and grunting unamiably at her haste. She had had a pleasant visit at the Tracys, and had got up early to breakfast with them before they took a train to Bangor. Not a rumour of the fire of the night before had reached her, and with a happy face, and frequent glances at a basket on her arm, in which reposed a fine, large fruit cake for grampa, who was fond of sweets as Mrs. Tracy always remembered, she hurried along the road by the river. Her eyes leaped ahead, past the Smiths' and the Dollivers', in search of the little, two-storied white cottage with the tiny tower which was the dearest spot on earth to her.

Why! what did it mean? There was no cottage roof showing through the tree tops that were just bursting into leaf — no neatly curtained windows were waiting to greet her like quiet friendly eyes of the house.

She broke into a run, and wheeled breathlessly into the yard. Her amazed, sweeping glance took in everything — the still smoking ruins, the deserted yard — no, not deserted, for there were little Housetop and his mate, strutting gaily about, spreading their tails, and cooing as harmoniously as if there were no such thing in the world as trouble.

'Tilda Jane stopped, started forward, stopped again, and clasping her hands looked about her.

The sound of a cheery whistle broke upon her ear, and at the same instant, someone threw open the big barn door.

"Oh, Hank!" she cried, and dismay, grief and anxiety were so blended in her tone, that he did not know which prevailed.

"Hello, sissy," he replied, "the early bird gets the worm — but he misses the fire of the night before. Why didn't you come to it?"

"The fire!" she ejaculated, and with a groan, she sank on one of the big parlour chairs that was reposing as naturally in the yard as if it belonged there.

Hank knew that she was rather an undemonstrative girl, but her capacity for suffering was greater than that of most demonstrative persons, and he surveyed her compassionately.

"Hold on to yourself, sissy," he said, "don't

mourn. We're going to have another house with all the latest improvements."

"Where's grampa and the pup?" she gasped, "and Perletta?"

"Safe and sound at the Melançons', but not up yet, I guess. It's still early, and we had a gay night."

"Hank, how did it happen?"

He told her all he knew about it, but said he had not talked much to his father, for fear of exciting him.

"And our happy home is gone," said the little girl at last, "our bright, beautiful home."

"You can't burn up homes, sissy."

She stared at him miserably.

"Homes are here," he said laying a hand on his heart. "Now you wait, and, by night, you'll have a new, first-class case for your home right on this spot."

"Hank, what are you talking about?"

His eyes twinkled. "We're going to take the out-door cure, sissy. You see this fine, clean barn, not near as old as the house was. I'm a-going to sweep the hay off this floor, arrange this furniture we saved, buy a bit more, have a big table for eating, and another for cooking on, clear away that pig pen in the yard, and have a small shelter

for a cook-stove, and a covered runway from it to the barn — "

"Why we'll live right here, then," interrupted 'Tilda Jane with a lightening of her worried face.

"Right here, sissy, and up there in the hay loft I'll fix a bed-room for you, and one for Perletta. A few planks and nails will do it, and, by the time we want to put in our winter hay, we'll either find a place in the neighbourhood for it, or else if the new house is pretty well on, we'll be able to camp in it, and put the hay here in its proper place."

'Tilda Jane actually smiled.

"And we'll have these big doors open all the time," continued Hank, "and drink in lots of fresh air, and there won't be a heap of housework to do, and you can study and go for rides."

"Hank, you dear brother," she said, rubbing her hand over her eyes.

"And I'll clean out the harness-room," Hank went on, "and fit it up for a bower for dad, where he can sit and weep or smile as he chooses, and put an oil stove in, lest his old bones get chilly."

"Oh! he won't," said 'Tilda Jane happily, "the summer is right on us, and it is so warm here by the river."

"I don't think he'll need it, still I'd like him

to know it's there, and if he doesn't approve, I'll hire a room for him at Mrs. Melançon's."

"He'll be sure to want to stay with us — Oh dear! how lovely to be out here with the animals."

"I'll close them in — they'll have their own quarters, we ours," said Hank, "but this barn has always been kept clean, and it's a more decent place to live in than many persons have. Then, best of all, sissy, camping right here on our own property will enable me to watch the workmen as they put up our new house, and if there's any scamping done, I'll jump square on to them. See, here's the plan. I couldn't sleep, so I got up and sketched it on this shingle."

The young girl bent her head over the shingle, and was soon deep in an animated discussion of the arrangement of rooms in the new house.

"That's the way to do, sissy," said Hank, rising after a time, and putting the shingle away. "If you get a knock-down blow, jump right up and begin to lay about how to get in another at fate. I'm not going to give up as long as there's breath in my body — Now let us go find some breakfast."

"I'm feverish to begin cooking right here," said 'Tilda Jane looking about her.

"Good for you, sissy, but stop till I find you the wherewithal. Perletta did fine in snatching a lot of cooking pots and pans out of the wood-

house — see, they're in a heap there, but we'll have to board with Mrs. Melançon for a few days — Hold on! 'pon my misfortunes, if there ain't Mr. Waysmith and Muffles. Is my face dirty, sissy?"

"A little, not much," she replied, "it's not to be wondered at. Don't stop to clean yourself, he won't like to wait," and she stepped back, so that he could go first to greet his employer.

"Well, sir, I take this as a kindness to come here at this early hour," said Hank gratefully, after Mr. Waysmith had spoken to him.

"I was anxious about your father," said Mr. Waysmith. "Did he get a great shock?"

"Yes sir, but I guess it won't hurt him."

Mr. Waysmith's eyes went roving about the barn and yard.

"He's at a neighbour's, sir, with the pup. By the way, sir, it was your pup that gave the alarm."

Mr. Waysmith looked incredulous, then delighted in a subdued way. "That young thing?" he presently ejaculated.

"Yes sir, he clawed at father and woke him. When Handy Andy was younger, he was always sleepy and heavy the first part of the night, but now he's nervous and sleeps late in the morning — he's just changed round in his habits — I guess he was wakeful, and smelt the smoke. They say dogs are sensitive to it. He's the true son of his father,"

and Hank pointed to Muffles who was standing some distance off, sniffing at the ruins of the house.

"So the pup woke your father," said Mr. Waysmith with immense satisfaction.

"Yes, sir, and it looks to me as if we'd have had a pretty close shave for our lives, if it hadn't been for him. I'm feared father would have gone, for he was right close to the kitchen. I might have got out and the girl, though we're both powerful sleepers."

"I will go and call on your father," said Mr. Waysmith, "but I want to ask you some questions first — You will, of course, rebuild?"

Hank glanced at 'Tilda Jane who was gazing affectionately and admiringly into the merchant's face. Mr. Waysmith had politely taken off his hat to her, and she expected no further recognition. She was content to stand and look at him, but now at Hank's significant nod, she quietly slipped away to the back of the garden, to interview Dodge and Grappler as to their experiences during the fire. Poacher and Gippie followed her. They were both uneasy. Gippie kept raising his head to catch the smoky odours about him, while Poacher ran from 'Tilda Jane to the ruined cellar and back again, too perturbed to go and greet the strange dog, Muffles.

"I didn't want sissy there, to know just how hard up I am," said Hank in a low voice. "I've been talking big about building, but she would fret if she knew how little I have to build on."

"Have you any money at all?" inquired Mr. Waysmith.

"Only five hundred insurance, and my salary, sir."

"Any debts?"

"No sir."

"How much money do you need to put up another house?"

"I guess I can do it for two thousand five hundred, sir. I don't want any fol-de-rols."

"I will lend you two thousand dollars without interest," said his employer, "and when the house is finished, I wish to furnish it — the furniture to be a present to your adopted sister."

Hank flushed under his grimy skin. "That's very handsome in you, sir."

"Not at all. I have money. Everyone knows it. I had a hard time to get it, and I belong to a large class of the well-to-do who wish, who long to be of benefit to young men struggling to get a footing. The trouble is we can't find deserving ones. Once you begin to help a fellow, he drops a dead weight on your hands. That's the curse of riches to my mind. You can't help anyone."

"I don't want your money, sir," said Hank sturdily, "except as a loan."

"I know that," said Mr. Waysmith in his slow, concentrated way, "if you did want it as a gift, you wouldn't get it. I have watched you. I know that instead of spending your evenings with a set of fast young fellows as you used to do, you come home and sit with your old father, and try to pick up a little information from books."

Hank looked sheepish, and said nothing.

"You may draw on me at any time for the amount I named," said Mr. Waysmith. "I wish the money to be paid back in the shape of monthly instalments. That will be equal to a low house rent — say, eight dollars a month."

Hank smiled broadly. "You'll be a long time getting your money, sir."

"I can wait."

"Sir," said the young man, seriously, "I don't want to gush, but on the other hand, I don't want you to think I'm ungrateful. You've never been mean. You have the name of being good pay for hard work, and I would like to say, sir, that your assistant bookkeeper won't keep your books any worse for his grateful feelings. My father served you faithfully before me — and I'd just like to find anyone cheating you of a cent."

Mr. Waysmith gave him a keen glance. Was it

"'SHE MUST TELL HER SECRETS TO THE ANIMALS.'"

possible that he did not know of his father's theft of the two hundred and fifty dollars? The old man would not tell him of course, but could the little girl keep such a secret?

He looked wonderingly at her as she stood down near the lilacs, her dogs at her heels, the pigeon on her shoulder, the two pigs staring inquiringly at her, and, wonder of wonders, his own pet Muffles sneaking round the smoking cellar to get to her.

"She must tell her secrets to the animals," reflected the surprised man, and he whistled to Muffles, and strode away thoughtfully toward the Melançon house. "Most girls of fifteen and sixteen are chatterboxes. What self-control for one so young."

"Sissy, I say, sissy," exclaimed Hank running after her, when his employer was out of sight. "Misfortunes turned inside out are blessings."

The young girl moved round deliberately on account of the pigeon on her shoulder. "If the misfortunes ain't your fault, brother, there's good in them. You didn't set the fire. It came upon you. I'm proud to have you take it right. You're braver than I am."

Hank, in a few gleeful sentences, told her how Mr. Waysmith was going to help him. "Not bad, that," he added, "considering that we most burnt up his dog."

"If we had, he would have known that we didn't mean to," said the little girl softly. "Hank, I guess folks are pretty sharp at knowing what we're to blame for, and what we're not."

"Sometimes I guess they are," he said in a puzzled way, "sometimes they don't seem to. I say life is a queer thing, anyway you take it, sissy."

"I s'pose it is," she said humbly, "I haven't lived long, but I know this much, Hank. If I make faces at people, they make 'em back at me; if I look pleasant, they look pleasant."

"That's it," exclaimed Hank, "and I'm going to keep on grinning. Some big writer said that the world is a looking-glass."

CHAPTER XXII

COUSIN OONAH RILEY

One month later, summer had fairly begun. The Dillson family had been keeping house in the barn for three weeks, and the plan had proved to be a great success. They had plenty of fresh air, they had liberty, they had room, and Hank declared that the novelty of the experiment pleased them all as much as a trip to foreign parts would have done.

On this balmy, sunny afternoon, the big barn doors, front and back, were thrown wide open. The main floor was their sitting-room, and chairs and tables were arranged neatly against the walls. Through the open doorways they had a wide extended view — the road, the river and meadows in front, and a rolling farming country at the back.

Grampa sat in his big rocking-chair that the Melançons had dragged through his bed-room window the night of the fire. He was not sitting inside the barn, but right out in the yard. So enamoured had they all become of fresh air that nothing but complete out-door life seemed to satisfy them. His

rheumatism was much better, and for a part of every day, he walked without his crutches, using only a cane.

His gaze was bent dreamily on the masons who were busy repairing the cellar walls of the old house, and adding to them for the new one. He was thinking of Hank, who had taken his holidays early in the season so that he might be at home as soon as the framework of the house was put up.

"I guess I can trust 'em with the foundation," the young man had said, "I've sworn the masons to faithfulness — but watch 'em, watch 'em, father, when I'm gone. There's an awful looseness in business honour. I don't know what's the matter with the people. There are only five men in Ciscasset I'd trust to clear out that cellar, and add to it for the new house, and that's you and me, and honest old Joe Whiting, the lawyer, and Mr. Tracy, the minister, and Mr. Waysmith, and we ain't any of us likely to undertake the job."

Hank had been gone a week, and Handy Andy had been gone ten days, for Mr. Waysmith had taken him to Boston, though grampa reflected with a comforted feeling in the neighbourhood of his heart, that Mr. Waysmith had hinted something about bringing him back.

How he did miss that dog, and slow tears formed in his old eyes. Who would have believed that he,

Hobart Dillson, would have, at his time of life, become so fond of a dumb creature.

"It was because he fancied me," thought the old man, as if apologizing for his senile affection. "Like begets like. The little fellow would enjoy this life — he's fond of excitement, and he likes being out-doors. Heigh-ho! I wish he'd come back."

"What's the matter, grampa?" inquired 'Tilda Jane solicitously.

The old man turned and looked at her, as she sat on the barn sill, with a pan on her lap, paring potatoes for their supper.

"What you doing that for?" he asked, sharply, "you'll make your fingers black. Let the girl do it."

"She's gone to town," said 'Tilda Jane, quietly.

"To town," repeated the old man, irritably, "seems to me, she's always in town lately. What does she do there?"

"I don't know," replied 'Tilda Jane in a low voice, and her face became red and troubled.

Grampa was staring suspiciously at her. "What are you blushing for?"

"I don't know," said 'Tilda Jane truthfully.

"Is that girl bothering you?"

"N-no, not exactly, sir. She's always been a kind of riddle to me."

"There she comes now, a-sauntering up the road

as if she owned it," exclaimed grampa, "why doesn't the girl hurry? Perletta — Perletta, I say — shove those big feet of yours along faster, and come here and do these potatoes. You ain't hired to gad, but to work."

"Oh, sir," said 'Tilda Jane protestingly, "please don't — if you knew how kind she is lately — don't say a word."

Grampa sat up straighter in his chair, and stared more intently at her. "Kind — how kind — what has she to do with kindness?"

"If you knew how much she thinks of you," the little girl went on in a low voice. "She's got you the 'cutest Christmas present."

"A Christmas present for me," spluttered grampa, "in June, and 'cute. I'll make her less 'cute."

"Oh don't sir — don't go any further," implored 'Tilda Jane. "She got it now, because it was cheaper on account of the moths — you'll be sorry, sir. She has a good business head in some ways —"

Grampa was in a rage. He was really very much upset mentally on account of Hank's absence, and that of the pup, and, though his bodily health was so much improved, it did him good to have a mental outburst occasionally. He was just preparing to work himself into a tempest of wrath and scorn, and

was fiercely muttering, "Moths — moths — what have I to do with moths?" when to 'Tilda Jane's great relief a carriage came swiftly up the road, passed Perletta, and drove in through their open gateway.

"It's Mr. Waysmith," exclaimed grampa, who had an eye as keen as an eagle's where his former employer was concerned, and, with astonishing rapidity for one so old, he smoothed his perturbed forehead, changed his tone, and, by the time the coachman had pulled up his horses a little way from him, his old face was wreathed with smiles — for there was Handy Andy, his beloved pet, springing from the surrey.

Right for grampa's neck he came, and such springing, licking, barking and tail-wagging, grampa had seen only once before, namely on the occasion of the return of the dog from his trip with Perletta.

"Good little boy, fine little fellow," grampa murmured, stooping and patting him, wherever his hand could find a resting-place on the slippery back. "What a little supple-jack of a man. So, so, good doggie, lie down."

Probably grampa was the happiest person in Ciscasset. There stood the man he admired and revered, looking down at him with an absolutely beaming face. Now he could see plainly how much

his dog loved grampa, and the more Handy Andy jumped, the more ecstatic grampa became.

"Dillson," said the merchant, suddenly, "I shall never take that dog from you again, except for shows."

"Sir," exclaimed grampa in an awed voice, and he gazed at the dog's master in a state of such supreme satisfaction that he became speechless.

"Yes, I will only take him away for shows," repeated Mr. Waysmith. "He has been to Boston and New York shows, and he carried everything before him in the puppy class, but large cities don't agree with him, and the sea air makes him cough. I rushed him back to this inland place, by the advice of several first-class veterinaries. He is a wonder of a dog, but if he is not carefully handled, he will be a sick, played-out specimen. A quiet life, and congenial companionship were strongly advised for him."

"And he'll be my dog," muttered grampa, at last finding his voice, "my little dog till I die, 'cause I'll not last long — May the Lord bless you, sir," he added fervently, and in a louder key, "You don't know what this is to me," and, greatly to his own astonishment and mortification, he, Hobart Dillson, began to cry like a baby.

Big tears — as big as a baby's, rolled down his old cheeks, and Handy Andy in concern stopped

his prancing, and lovingly tried to lick them away.

"Stop, sir," grampa managed to ejaculate irritably, "get out — it's none of your business. Where's my handkerchief — I say, 'Tilda, can't you find me my handkerchief?"

The little girl silently passed him her own, and while grampa mopped his quivering face, Handy Andy caught sight of her, and, springing at her, began over again his demonstrations of delight at being again with his own loved family.

Mr. Waysmith had politely turned away on observing grampa's emotion, and, stepping to the surrey, he brought out something wrapped in a linen duster.

"Why, sir," exclaimed 'Tilda Jane when he threw back the linen, "it's another dog."

Mr. Waysmith smiled. "It is Andy's half sister, born a little while after him, and named by me Oonah Riley. You remember Cousin Oonah Riley, that lived with Handy Andy's mother in Samuel Lover's story?"

Grampa had recovered himself, and was jealously surveying 'Tilda Jane. "What's that, sir — what's that?" he asked suspiciously. "I'm the one Hank read 'Handy Andy' to — come here, pup. Jump on my knee."

Mr. Waysmith walked toward him again. "I

was just saying, Dillson, that I have another dog here, the same stock as Handy Andy, and with an Irish name, for I liked your suggestion about your pet's name."

"Have you brought it to us to bring up?" asked grampa, "can we do anything for you about it? The dog looks sick."

"She is sick," said Mr. Waysmith, then he smiled again. "You know, Dillson, you told me that you would take care of as many dogs as I chose to bring to you."

"I said it, sir, and I'll stick to it," grampa responded emphatically. "We're living in a barn, and we can accommodate a good many, and if the barn ain't large enough, we'll hire a neighbour's," and he laughed a shrill, happy cackle of a laugh.

Mr. Waysmith bestowed a grateful glance on him, then he said, "I must tell you this dog's history. She was a frail puppy, something like Andy, but when very young she took a great fancy to a little boy, the son of one of the men employed in my kennels in Boston. This lad petted her very much, and I gave her to him to bring up. Unfortunately, he has just died, poor boy, though both for his own sake, as well as the dog's, I did everything to save him, and since then, Oonah will neither eat nor sleep properly. She is dying by

inches, and I brought her here, thinking that possibly your little girl," and he glanced at 'Tilda Jane, "would be kind enough to see if she can rouse her."

"Wouldn't she play with Handy Andy?" inquired grampa, "he is a kind little dog."

"He is too rough for her in her present state of health," replied Mr. Waysmith, "she should be kept alone — that is from other dogs for a while. She is as weak as water — Sit down, will you, and take her in your arms," he said to 'Tilda Jane.

'Tilda Jane hurried into the barn, and was dragging out a chair for Mr. Waysmith, when he took it from her, and motioned her to sit down herself.

"Speak to her," he said, putting the dog in her lap.

'Tilda Jane looked down at Cousin Oonah Riley. She was a smaller dog than Andy, and was of a lighter, more golden brindle than his, while instead of his even white line between the eyes, she had a face that was half brindle, half white blaze. Her eyes were beautiful — large and full, and so pathetic that 'Tilda Jane's own eyes grew moist as she looked into them.

"Poor doggie," she said, patting her softly, "poor doggie — you feel sad."

Mr. Waysmith, watching breathlessly, saw a

flash of interest come in Oonah's sad eyes. Then she lifted her head, and stared into the little girl's face.

"Speak to her again," he said in a low, hurried voice, and stepping back a little.

"Life is full of trouble, isn't it," continued 'Tilda Jane, addressing Oonah as if she were an intelligent human being. "When I was young like you, I had lots of it, too, but I got over it. What I have now doesn't count. It isn't the little things that fret me, it's the big ones — I guess you felt pretty bad when that nice boy died."

To Mr. Waysmith's amazement, Oonah pushed her hot, feverish muzzle against 'Tilda Jane's hand, then, stretching out a pink, a very pale pink tongue, licked it gratefully.

"You're hot and tired from your journey," said the little girl, "come with me, and I will give you some nice, cool milk," and, cuddling the sick dog to her as if she were a baby, she got up and went into the barn.

The two men followed her movements with intense interest. They saw her put the dog down on the floor, then go in search of a saucer of milk. By the time she returned, Oonah had staggered to her feet, and was licking her lips.

"There, honey, drink this," said 'Tilda Jane bending over her, and Mr. Waysmith, to his inexpressible satisfaction, saw the weary dog take the

milk, and then agitate her tail gratefully, and stare up into her new friend's face.

"Now come, go to sleep," and, sitting down in the new rocking-chair that Hank had bought, to take the place of the one destroyed in the fire, 'Tilda Jane took the tired animal in her arms, and began to rock to and fro, and to sing as unconsciously as if she were alone, a versified rendering of the old and yet ever interesting tale of Mother Hubbard and her famous dog.

"It's wonderful," murmured Mr. Waysmith, turning to grampa. "I never saw anyone with such a hold over animals."

Grampa looked down at Handy Andy who was reposing in his old place across his knees. "They say animals ain't got souls," he remarked drily, "but whatever they've got in the place of them, 'Tilda seems to look into, right down through their eyes."

"It's affection — genuine affection and interest that she possesses," said Mr. Waysmith. "If we all had that for each other, for animals, for criminals, and for little children, there would not be so much going astray in the world."

"Seems funny for me, an old man to say it," remarked grampa, "but love is a power."

Mr. Waysmith sighed sympathetically, then crept on tiptoe toward 'Tilda Jane.

Oonah must have been soothed by the tale of the afflictions of the legendary Hubbard dog, for she had fallen into a sound sleep.

"Is her flesh twitching?" whispered Mr. Waysmith, with the concentrated interest of a doctor surveying a patient.

'Tilda Jane shook her head. "She hasn't twitched, sir, since she dropped off."

"Capital," he muttered, "she hasn't had even a cat nap without starting up these last three days. I saw there was only this chance for her, so I hurried her up here."

"Do you want her to be my little dog for a while, sir?" asked 'Tilda Jane.

"Yes, if you will be so kind. Keep her quiet, and away from the other dogs."

"Poacher is down by the river with the pigs. He goes there these warm days, and Gippie is asleep in that corner. He don't see as well as he did, and I guess he won't bother her. I'll keep both eyes on her, sir."

"Why do you think dogs like you?" asked Mr. Waysmith, searchingly.

'Tilda Jane's dreamy glance went out through the big back barn doors, to the farms in the distance. "When I was a tiny girl, sir, in an orphan asylum, there was one ladyboard I loved. She used to sit down by me, and put her arm round me,

She didn't say soft words much, but I felt something when she was near. I guess it was 'cause she really and truly liked all little children. If she hadn't been delicate, and stayed away, I'd never have run off. I guess she would have stood by me — Animals are most as smart as we are, sir, about knowing who likes them."

Mr. Waysmith nodded, thoughtfully, and, saying good-bye to her and to grampa, walked toward his carriage.

To 'Tilda Jane's surprise, he stopped on the way to greet Perletta, who had quietly entered the yard some time before, and had seated herself on the wooden platform.

The little girl stopped rocking the dog for a minute. What was Mr. Waysmith saying to Perletta to make her hang her head and blush, either with pleasure or shame?

CHAPTER XXIII

PERLETTA PUZZLES HER FRIENDS

It was late that same night. 'Tilda Jane and Perletta had seen grampa safely in his "bower" as Hank called the harness-room. It was really a very neat little bed-room now, and the spectacle of grampa tucked in bed, with his beloved pup at his feet, was so affecting to 'Tilda Jane that she gave a squeal of rapture, and ran to embrace, again and again, the young dog, who was so sleepy from his travels that he impatiently opened his mouth and bit at her, to bid her begone.

"Let him alone, little girl," said grampa, "he's snappy like most folks when they're fagged-out. Good night, and pleasant dreams to you."

"And Perletta," said 'Tilda Jane, softly, "oh! add Perletta, grampa."

"And Perletta," he said, crossly, "now get out, both of you."

Perletta, who stood in the doorway holding a lantern in her hand, and not glowering at him, as she used to, even when she was doing him some

favour, but now benevolent and patient in expression, uttered a pleased and surprised, "Good night, sir," then led the way to the ladder by which she and 'Tilda Jane ascended to their respective sleeping places. Grampa had his big bell by him, as he used to have in the burned house, but he was so well now that he never had occasion to ring it in the night.

'Tilda Jane found Oonah sleeping peacefully on the bed in her sweet-smelling room. The loft was pretty well empty of hay now, but the odour remained, and whether it was owing to that, or to the good supper the little creature had taken, she was certainly reposing well, and with none of the twitchings of flesh that Mr. Waysmith so much dreaded.

'Tilda Jane undressed, said her prayers, and was soon sleeping soundly beside her new pet, while Gippie reposed in his box in the corner. Poacher, the guardian of the family in Hank's absence, lay downstairs by the front barn door that had been barred for the night.

"You'll get plenty of air through the windows at night," Hank had said before he went away. "Don't leave the doors open. Some tramp might sneak in and frighten you."

The whole family slept but Perletta. She was wide awake, and, leaning far out the window in

her end of the loft, stared out at the road, faintly gray and dusty in the moonlight, and at the silver line of the river beyond.

Her thoughts, however, were not on the beauty of nature, as 'Tilda Jane's would have been. Perletta was too material to experience heartfelt and comforting raptures over a sunset or moonrise. She was rejoicing in the possession of a secret — a most important and substantial sort of secret, and, with irrepressible chuckles, she gazed down into the cellar of the new house where the masons were carrying on their work of repair.

"I could fix 'em up better nor they're plannin' to be fixed," she muttered gleefully, "if they'd let me. They'll hev to do the squar' thing though — who's that comin'? A man, as I'm alive."

It was true. As she stood leaning out the window, and soliloquizing, a man had entered their yard, and was swinging up at a good pace toward the barn door. He was carrying a suit case in his hand, and, as her eye fell on it, her expression of alarm changed to one of cunning and relief.

"It's him," she said, "and if leetle 'Tilda Jane don't wake up and poke in, I'll hev some fun a-badgerin' him, to even up for the time he badgered me," and slyly withdrawing her head from the window, she took up the lighted lantern beside her,

and went stealthily down the ladder to the barn floor.

The man was knocking softly, "Hello there! hello! — didn't I see a light? Let me in."

"Who's a-knockin'?" asked Perletta in sepulchral tones.

"It's me," replied a well-known voice.

"And who's 'me'?" she asked with a grin of reminiscence.

"Hey, there! you Perletta," was the reply, "you think you're awful funny, don't you. Open this door, and let me in."

"Get out, you tramp," she replied with assumed wrath. "The boss of this ranch is away. He tole me to stan' guard as I was the biggest. Said he, 'Perletta, you're to let no one in at night, an' if thieves come, mind you stan' in front of dad an' 'Tilda, an' let 'em hit you fust.'"

"Oh! swallow that nonsense," said Hank, impatiently, "and open this door. Do you hear?"

Perletta was so convulsed with laughter, that she had to set her lantern on the floor. Then, composing herself, she seized Poacher by the neck as he was throwing himself against the door in transports of delight.

"Your voice," she said gruffly, "is like the boss's, but I mistrusts you. He's off on a fishin' trip. We've gut vallybles in here — a sewin'

machine, an' nice black furnitoor, an' a noo dog wuth a million, et cettery, et cettery."

"Now look here, Perletta," said Hank in a rage, "if you don't open this door, I'll knock it down."

"You kin't do it," she chuckled, "go 'way, Mr. Robber-An'-A-Thief. Honest folkses is in bed, an' rogues is a-runnin'."

Hank, in exasperation, started such a pounding on the door that Perletta, seizing the lantern, fled toward the ladder, and climbed to her perch in the hay loft.

'Tilda Jane, awakened by the noise, felt confusedly for Oonah, who was yelping with alarm, then she began to crawl out of bed, her first thought for grampa.

Suddenly the lantern was thrust through the curtains of her doorway, and Perletta, gasping with laughter, ejaculated, "It's Hank — go let him in."

'Tilda Jane, with a hasty pat on Oonah's back, threw on some clothing, swung herself down the ladder with a celerity born of much going up and down, and was soon unbarring the door for Hank, who was tired and in more of a temper than she had ever before seen him in.

"Where's that idiot — that simpleton — that witless lout?" he cried, as he stamped into the barn. "If I'm spared till morning, she'll march."

"Oh! Hank, dear, you don't mean Perletta,"

exclaimed 'Tilda Jane in dismay. "Don't say anything against her — wait till I tell you how good she's been."

"Good — she's a beast, a demon," said Hank, wildly, "I never did like her. I hate her now — to shut a fellow out of his own house in the dead of night!"

"Did she try to keep you out?" asked 'Tilda Jane. "Oh! Hank — isn't she waggish? She's trying to pay you back for that trick you got off on her when she came back after running away with puppy and the pigeon."

"How dare she?" spluttered Hank, "I'll teach her — Good London! hear that man roaring, and that bell a-ringing — Yes sir, I'm coming."

"Hurry, Hank, hurry — I hate to have him worked up," and 'Tilda Jane, lantern in hand, flew toward the harness-room, where grampa and Handy Andy were both yelling at the top of their lungs to the accompaniment of the dinner bell.

"The barn is on fire — the pup and I will burn alive," shouted grampa with one leg out of bed — "help me, someone! Oh! I feel so feeble."

"Get back, sir, get back," cried Hank, dashing in before 'Tilda Jane. "The barn ain't on fire, and ain't going to be, and you know it. You just want a mite of attention. Get into bed — there's a lady coming. Your son will wrap you up," and he af-

fectionately bundled his father back to his warm nest, trying meanwhile to ward off attacks from the relieved and delighted Andy, who was trying to devour him with caresses.

Grampa submitted blissfully to his tucking in. He had his son back, and the pup in addition. Now he was an entirely happy man. Still there was one drop of bitterness in his cup, now that he thought of it. "You talk of a lady, son," he mumbled with concern. "You ain't married, be you?"

"Married!" ejaculated Hank, scornfully, "I'm pretty daring, but I dassent bring another female into this nursery which is alive with 'em already — How do you s'pose 'Tilda and Perletta would greet a lady — Andy get down — I say sir, I'm glad you've got your dog back, and he's riotous to see me. It's kind of cheering to have something show joy, if it's only dumb critters," and he caressed Poacher who was affectionately licking his dusty shoes, as he could reach no other part of his person. "Only dogs, and my old dad think anything of poor Hank."

"I guess you're tired, brother," said 'Tilda Jane, calmly. "You know how much Perletta and I think of you."

"Perletta — that witch," exclaimed grampa, who, now that his fit of temper and fright was

over, was beginning to get the drift of things, and to understand that 'Tilda Jane was the lady Hank had referred to, "What's the matter with that girl? She's powerful cheeky lately. Seems as if a new spirit had got into her."

"I wouldn't call it cheeky, sir," suggested 'Tilda Jane, mildly. "She's out more, but she hasn't been cheeky in the house, not since Hank left, till to-night when he came home."

"So I'm the one that's upsetting her, am I?" said Hank resentfully, "well Miss Perletta can go. I'll find another girl."

"What made you come home so soon, boy?" asked grampa, "your time ain't up — you've only been gone a week."

"I guess I got homesick," said Hank, sulkily, "beds were hard, and rooms were stuffy, and fish scarce wherever I went, and food not fit to eat. I got dyspepsy, and begun to hate everyone, and, thinks I, those masons are fooling dad about the cellar, I'll bet, and so I thought I'd come home — and this is the welcome I get — 'Tilda Jane, why don't you go to bed, instead of standing there like a sick ghost?"

"Good night, then," she said sweetly, "sleep well, brother and grampa. I'll leave the lantern. I can go up the ladder in the dark."

As she climbed upward, she murmured, "I never

knew before that it made a man so mad to be locked out of his own barn, but I guess he'll be all right in the morning — Why Oonah," and she greeted the delighted little dog who had slipped off the bed, and was waiting for her in the dark at the top of the ladder, "is that your soft tongue licking my hand? I thought it must be Gippie. Good girlie, I won't leave you again."

Her philosophical prediction with regard to Hank came true. He was all right in the morning, and acted as if he were quite ashamed of his surliness the night before. He overwhelmed 'Tilda Jane with attentions, and even threw a forgiving glance toward Perletta who was warily keeping in the background.

"'Pon my appetite," he said, feelingly, as he pushed his chair back from the breakfast table set in the middle of the barn floor, "I ain't tasted a meal like that since I left home, and it's simple enough, too."

"You're a regular home body," said grampa, whose delight at having him back was too strong to be concealed. "Your mother was," he added in a lower key. "You take it from her."

Hank looked quickly at him. His father rarely spoke of the mother, dead now so many years ago that Hank barely remembered her.

"I guess she was a pretty good woman, warn't

she, dad?" he said, "I just call up having her lay her hand on my head."

"She was a good woman," said grampa, and his old head dropped on his breast. Then, raising it, he said keenly, "and I for one don't want to see no other in her place while I'm alive."

Hank smirked at Handy Andy, who was going round underneath the table, untying everybody's shoe laces.

"Dad, you've got a wholesale fear of my getting married, but don't you fret. I ain't likely to set no daughter-in-law over you. This is your house as long as you live."

"If you married, Hank," said 'Tilda Jane wistfully, "would I have to leave?"

"No siree," said the young man, striking the breakfast table with his fist.

"Yes she would," cried Perletta, advancing from the back of the barn, and speaking in a cross and surly voice.

Hank looked her up and down, with mingled amusement and disdain. Then he said, "And please, who would support you two babes in the wood?"

"I'd do it," replied Perletta, drawing up her big frame majestically.

"What on?" pursued Hank, with twinkling eyes.

"Money," responded Perletta oracularly, then she withdrew into the shade of a clump of lilacs by the back barn door.

"Dad," said Hank, turning to his father, "what a pickle you've got me into with these young females, on account of your talk of marriage, and I ain't got no more idea of such a thing than you have."

"I guess you're a free man," said grampa, tartly, "you ain't beholden to no females, about what you'll do, or not do."

"I ain't beholden," said Hank, "but mark me, it ain't wise nor agreeable to stir up any female beyond teething age. 'Let sleeping dogs lie,' is a good saying, and I add, 'Let sleeping womankind lie, too,' till they choose to wake themselves — Now I'm a-going to interview the masons out there, then will trot down by the river to talk over my troubles with the pigs. I see they've led Poacher down already. My! it's queer not to have to hurry off to the mill. Fine too — you don't enjoy rest unless you have worked, and you don't properly enjoy work unless you rest a bit once in so often — Guess I'll take Milkweed," and getting up, he went to the door of her stall, opened it, and allowed her to follow him like a dog down to the river.

Perletta was still sulking at the back of the barn.

'Tilda Jane was smiling sedately, and after calling to Hank, "Walk up and down the willow path, brother. I'll run down and see you as soon as I finish the dishes," she hurriedly began to clear off the breakfast table.

A short time later, Hank, with Poacher at his heels, was pacing up and down the river bank. His hands were in his pockets, he was whistling cheerily, watching meanwhile Milkweed, who was munching the sweet meadow grass, and the pigs who were in their favourite mud bath near a tangle of alders. Hearing an answering whistle, he looked up, and saw 'Tilda Jane stepping carefully down the bank, holding Oonah under her arm.

"Hank," she said when she got near him, "will you send Poacher to play with the pigs. I want Oonah to walk about a spell."

"Absquatulate, skedaddle, make tracks," said Hank to the hound, who, laying his ears back, went to join Dodge and Grappler. The two pigs received him with amiable grunts, and even climbed out of their bath to touch him with their snouts in a friendly fashion.

"Now dear, pace up and down behind us," said 'Tilda Jane to the small timid dog, and she set her on the well-worn path by the river.

Oonah with ears clapped tight to her head, tail between her legs, and quivering with excitement and

anxiety, followed closely, her nose close to 'Tilda Jane's ankles.

Seeing that she would take no harm from the exercise, 'Tilda Jane turned to Hank, "Brother, I can't tell you how glad I am to have you back. I've been so upsot — no upset, about Perletta since you went away that I didn't know what to do."

"What's the matter with the girl?" asked Hank carelessly.

"Why Hank, she's getting money somewhere — lots of it."

"Money!" he ejaculated, stopping short.

"Yes, brother, and she goes to town nearly every day. I wish she'd tell us what she's doing."

"Why didn't you ask her?"

"I did, brother. I said, 'Perletta, I'm bothered about you. Is everything all right about what you're doing?'"

"What did she say?"

"She said time would tell."

"You say she has lots of money — how much — five dollars?"

"Five dollars!" exclaimed 'Tilda Jane, rolling her eyes toward some men who were passing in a boat on the river, "why she's just bought grampa a fur-lined coat that cost I don't know how much — I know she said they took thirty dollars off, 'cause she got it out of season. They don't like

to pack their furs away now at the beginning of summer, on account of moths."

"She — bought — dad — a — fur-lined — coat," blurted Hank, taking his hands out of his pockets, and looking at them as searchingly as if he might find written on them an explanation of the mystery. "Why sissy, you can't buy a decent fur-lined coat less than ninety or a hundred dollars, and usually, they're a heap more."

"Well, Hank, she's got money left, for I saw a roll of bills sticking out of her purse. It wouldn't shut, and she had a piece of twine round it — and, brother," she added, shamefacedly, "she's given me something too."

"What is it?"

"A party dress," she said, "it's pink silk, and awful pretty, but too bold for me. Folks would stare."

"A pink silk dress," repeated Hank, "why, how you talk — and what has she got for me?"

"Nothing — she said she asked her lawyer what to buy for you, and he said you were a young man, and if any presents were to be made, you should give them to her, not she to you."

"Well I be jiggered," said Hank, in utter mystification, "her lawyer — and who is he, I want to know?"

"Mr. Joseph Whiting."

"Old Joseph Whiting — the smartest and honestest lawyer in town, and a howling 'ristocrat. You don't mean to say she's been to him?"

"Yes Hank, she showed me his name at the foot of a letter."

"Signed big and full with a lot of curlicues at the end?" asked Hank excitedly.

"Yes brother, just like snakes."

"That's old Whiting's signature. I see it a dozen times a week at the mill, but what under the sun would he be writing to Perletta for?"

"Now, Hank," remarked 'Tilda Jane, firmly, "Perletta ain't, I mean hasn't, been stealing. She isn't that kind. I was afraid of it at first, then I thought what a goose I was. Perletta is good. I feel it."

"'Course she is," said Hank, kindly. "She's a regular zany, but the girl is honest enough. You can tell by her eye. I guess I know what it is, 'Tilda; she's come into some money. There ain't a soul in this town would give her a dime."

"I expect that's it," said 'Tilda Jane, soberly, "yet at the same time I feel kind of uneasy about her. She isn't spending it right. She's like a child, Hank. Can't you do something?"

"Is she doing her work all right?"

"Yes, except when she goes to town a lot."

"Well, we hired her to do certain work. If she

does it, we can't complain. If she goes too much, tell her you can't spare her. Her money is her private concern. I can't meddle. That ain't business — but I'd return the pink silk, sissy. Tell her, you told me about it, and I ain't willing for you to keep it."

"She'll feel bad."

"Can't help that. She ain't going to make a ninny of you too."

"Do you s'pose grampa will take the coat?"

"Wait till she offers it. He'll settle her pretty quick."

"But Hank, she's awful good to make such presents."

"'Course she is, but dad and I ain't willing to fatten off any poor goose-cap like Perletta. Let her keep her money for herself. She ain't likely got much. You hold on a bit. I'll keep my eyes open, and I warrant you, I'll make some discoveries in Perletta's direction."

CHAPTER XXIV

PERLETTA MAKES AN EXPLANATION

During the next week, Hank watched Perletta as a cat watches a mouse, but with such discretion, and such apparent unconcern, that the girl never dreamed her every action was under the closest scrutiny.

He was able to play the part of a detective with great ease, for his holidays were not over, and his interest in the progress of the new house was a reasonable excuse for his spending so much time in and about his barn home.

At the end of a week, he and 'Tilda Jane again found themselves by the river one morning after breakfast. The same little company was reunited there. Milkweed was browsing fitfully, Poacher and the dogs were having a game of tag, while Cousin Oonah, greatly improved in health, was making short, scampering excursions into the long grass bordering the path, and, excited by the tickling of the green blades, was coming rushing back to 'Tilda Jane, and playfully laying hold of her

skirt with her white teeth, as if to urge her to have a game of chase with her.

'Tilda Jane, however, gave her but scant attention, for she was listening with all her ears to Hank who was speaking rapidly and earnestly.

" Sissy, my report's all ready. Perletta is a new girl. Something has happened to lift her out of her queer state of fighting everybody for what she used to call her rights. The chip's off her shoulder, but how it's been knocked off, I don't know. She's at rest in her mind, and feels she's as big as anyone. I expect, as I said last week, that someone has left her money. I've gone to town after her, and I've seen her go into Mr. Whiting's office three times. She don't stay long, but long enough for an interview. Now he wouldn't be bothered talking to her unless there was something to talk about. He's doing business for her, that's what it is, and the business has smoothed out some of the wrinkles in her character. You find her a heap easier to get on with, don't you?"

" She's as smooth as silk now," said 'Tilda Jane, enthusiastically, " and she don't growl at all, hardly."

" She's taken a shine to you, sissy, but there's one thing I don't like. Either through being dreamy, and thinking about what's happened to her, or feeling she's above it, I notice you have the

heft of the work. Now that's got to stop. School has closed, and you're having holidays, but still I ain't willing to keep a dog and bark myself. I was going to speak to Perletta about her breach of contract this morning, but just now she asked me if she could have a talk with me, and I told her to come down here by the river, 'cause she said she didn't want dad to hear. Now you stay when she comes — I don't want to talk to her alone. Hist — there she is on the bank. Here, talk about Oonah — don't let her think we've been going over her — Good doggie," and he bent down, and tried to caress the shrinking pup, who drew back from him, and braced herself against 'Tilda Jane.

" Poor little Oonah, poor girlie," said 'Tilda Jane, gently, " is she a scared young goosie? "

" How she dotes on you," said Hank in a clear voice, then, lifting his head, he said, " Come on down, Perletta — most of the family's here."

The big girl came awkwardly and solemnly down the bank, and stood before them, her red hands hanging at her sides.

Her eyes were fixed on 'Tilda Jane, but Hank said commandingly, " Don't mind her, speak out. I ain't got no secrets from sissy."

Perletta smiled peculiarly. " I've gut nothin' to say, but what will sound sweet to her ears, but

'Tilda Jane ain't bold. It makes her scrunch up to praise her to her face."

The little girl blushed shamefacedly, and hung her head, while Hank said brusquely, "No need of praise — cut it out, now what do you want to say to me?"

"I want to say this sir," Perletta began ponderously, and with a certain kind of dignity. "I ain't a poor girl no longer. I be a real lady."

"Oh! be you," said Hank gravely, "I'm proud to hear it, and, being a lady, I s'pose you'll always act like one."

"I'll act the lady to them as treats me like the lady," replied Perletta, "an' I'll fight them as don't, and, bein' a lady, I don't need to go out to service no more. I gives you warnin'."

"I want to know!" exclaimed Hank, "however," he added stoically, "I guess we'll bear up under it — Now would you mind giving us some information about the transformation scene that has made you out of a woman into a lady?"

"I don't know nothin' about seein' transfers," said Perletta, with ill-concealed rapture, "but I be what they calls an hairless."

"Hairless," repeated Hank surveying her fuzzy pate, "I should call you, on the contrary, main hairy."

"I'm an hairless," she continued in a state of

grave happiness too deep to be upset by his frivolity, "an' I've walked dead into a fortin."

"Do tell!" said Hank, "we've got it now — our old friend, money, which is the root of all evil. So you're an heiress, and you've come into a fortune?"

"Yes sir."

"And how much is your fortune?"

"Nine hundred dollars —"

She paused an instant, and Hank, with a glance at 'Tilda Jane, said with real feeling, "I say Perletta, that's fine. 'Tilda and I are glad, aren't we, sissy?"

"Glad — oh! so glad," said the little girl, clasping her hands. "Now you'll put that in the bank, Perletta, and keep it till your old days come."

"Maybe you'd better wait till I've hed time to say what I've begun," remarked Perletta with preternatural gravity, "It's nine hundred dollars a year."

Hank stared at her, at 'Tilda Jane, at the dogs, and the pigs, and then turned his head and gazed at Milkweed, who had come to join in the family conclave, and had thrust her velvety nose sociably over his shoulder. "Do I hear aright?" he asked, "or do my ears deceive me? Have you, Perletta Garraby, come into an annuity of nine hundred dollars a year?"

"That's what they calls it," she said emphatically, "Whiting & Co. and others. It's mine till death us do part — nine hundred even dollars by year, to do what I likes with, to chuck it in that river, or to give it to the boys there," and she indicated the pigs who had left their play to wallow again in the mud.

"And who is your benefactor?" asked Hank, staggering back to lean against Milkweed in pretended weakness.

"Do you mean the man as guv it to me?"

"Yes, hurry up and tell us — this is more funny than a story-book."

"'Twas an uncle — brother to my father. He were a doctor."

"Who was — your father?"

"Yes sir, he were a fine smart man when young. Then he took to passing the bottle, and, when he was older, he married my mother who were cook in the house where he boarded. She hed no learnin', but she were good, till he taught her to pass the bottle too. His folks was 'shamed to own him, but when this old man — "

"You mean your uncle?"

"Yes my uncle, before he come to die, he thinks of me, 'cause he knowed his brother hed one child. He tracked me through the 'sylum, then he wrote to ole man Whiting, an' ole man Whiting he went

on to Canady, where my uncle was a patient 'turney — "

"A what?" interrupted Hank.

"Patient slicers, then — here it is, wrote," and she drew out her well stuffed purse, and exhibited a newspaper clipping tucked among the bills.

"Patent solicitors," Hank read aloud, "or attorneys, as you were trying to call them. 'Garraby and Son, the old established firm. Head office, Toronto. Branches in Montreal, Winnipeg, Vancouver, and Washington, D. C.' — seems to me, I've heard of them. You don't mean to say you're a niece of the head of that firm?"

"He's dead," she said, solemnly, "him that was my uncle. Ole man Whiting saw him fust though, an' he tole him what Mr. Waysmith an' Mr. Tracy said about you, an' 'Tilda Jane, an' grampa, an' me."

"But what have we to do with it?" asked Hank in amazement.

"Him that was my uncle wanted to know where I was, what I was, who might be my friends. Ole man Whiting says he give good account of us all, an' my uncle he says, 'If my niece be what you say she be, she'll not hev need for much. She'd better bide with the good folks that's hed her, an' I'll leave enough to keep her comfortable.'"

Hank, for once in his life, had nothing to say.

He was turning over this new surprise of fortune in his mind, but raised his head when Perletta went on. "I hev a cousin — ole man Whiting says he's a boss-lookin' man, as straight as a Kennebec pine, but he's gut a wife an' young ones, an' he says he 'lows I'd fit in better here nor there."

Hank surveyed Perletta from head to foot. Evidently her uncle had been a rich man. His son would have had all the advantages that wealth and culture could bestow. Small wonder, that he wished to keep the ignorant, uncouth relative at a distance from him, and yet Hank resented his attitude.

"Great relatives!" he said aloud, "I guess you're well rid of them."

Perletta hunched her broad back significantly. "I ain't such as they be," she said, with more penetration than Hank would have given her credit for possessing.

A great wave of compassion swept over him. The unfortunate girl inspired him with infinitely more pity, now that he understood she realized the difference between herself and more favoured persons. "Don't you fret," he said consolingly, "you've got good friends here. You don't need to go to Canada."

'Tilda Jane's face was glowing with admiration and affection, and seizing Perletta's hand, she pressed it warmly. "You ain't hard, Perletta.

You've got lots of soft spots, and I'm never going to get tetchy with you again — and I guess I'll stand by you, even if you lose that money. I'm breathing easy now I know about it. It's like as if old Mount Katahdin had been lifted from my chest."

The big girl looked down at the smaller one clinging to her hand.

"You're just as tickled I hev that money, as if you hed it yourself," she said shrewdly, "he ain't," and she nodded her head toward Hank. "He'd ruther you'd hed it."

This statement was so true that Hank did not take the pains to deny it.

"Wal," continued Perletta, "I come here to talk business. I wants to know as my uncle said, and as I thinks myself, if you'll let me go on livin' with you, not as hired help, but as boarder."

Hank for a minute was slightly confused, and began to run over possibilities in his mind.

"I ain't a-goin' to work no more," Perletta went on, "I be goin' to study. Mr. Waysmith, he said he hed an idee of someone to learn me."

"Mr. Waysmith," ejaculated Hank, "have you been to him?"

"I hev — you an' 'Tilda runs to him with troubles, why not me?"

This question was unanswerable, and Hank put one in his turn. "Did he treat you well, Perletta?"

"As soft an' as easy as grease. I tole him my worries an' my joys, like he was my pa."

Hank turned round, made a face at Milkweed who was leaning her head too heavily on his shoulder, then once more directed his attention to Perletta, who was giving further information in a sing-song voice. "Says I to him, says I, 'Sir, I'm bent on stayin' with them folks, an' then there's the boys.' He arsked me what boys, an' I tole him all about Dodge an' Grappler, an' that it would be main hard to get board for two pigs an' a lady anywhere but here. He said that was so, — said I'd better bide here, an' you could get another girl to be hired help."

"Why, ain't he cute," observed Hank, "to take such an interest in you!"

"He tole me to pay good board, 'cause boarders was a bother, an' he said I'd better hev you plan a tasty room in the new house for me where I kin set an' read."

Hank looked incredulous. "Did Mr. Waysmith say all that?"

"Most of it," replied Perletta, solemnly. "In course, I tole him my idees, an' he bowed his head. An' he arsked me to call agin."

Hank began to laugh. "Perletta, you and Mr. Waysmith ain't got exactly the idea of a lady. L-a-d-y, don't spell lazybones."

"Ladies has white hands," Perletta observed seriously, "I lay out to hev mine as pale as milk," and she stretched out her two red, brawny paws as she spoke.

"But white hands alone don't make a lady," said Hank, impatiently. "A lady might shine stoves from morning till night, and day in and day out for a month, till her hands was as black as the lead, but still she'd be a lady."

"A dead lady," said Perletta owlishly, "shinin' stoves always lays me out."

"You can't make ladies," vociferated Hank, "that is, you can't make them in the way you're planning to do it. You're mixing up laziness with your idea of what's proper. You mustn't give up work, Perletta, you'd not be contented."

"Do you plan for me to board and work, too?" she asked suspiciously.

"No, no, you don't grasp my idea at all. I was a Tom Noddy to try to make you grasp it — you'll have to grow into it."

"In course, I'll take care of the boys," she said uncomprehendingly, and with a glance toward her wallowing pets, "but listen now, I don't count on no housework."

"Don't you suppose that I know boarders don't do housework?" asked Hank, shortly, "I was only

trying to get some of your buzzy ideas out of your head."

"An' I eats at your table," said Perletta warningly.

Hank broke into sudden laughter, "You're mightily afraid of kitchen boarding, you want to make sure of the parlour."

"An' when can I begin to board?" she asked eagerly.

"The first minute you see a bite of anything to eat," replied Hank explosively — "oh my! give me a minute to laugh. This is the creamiest thing I ever heard of."

Perletta gazed at him benevolently. "I'm awful pleased you're willin' for me to stay, an' to set down with you an' eat," she said, "I was feared you'd kick."

"Hold on," said Hank, "there's dad — my soul! I don't know what he'll say about having you in the family."

"He don't set much store by me," said Perletta, dejectedly, "kin you make him give in?"

"I'll try," said Hank.

"'Cause Mr. Waysmith 'lowed there was lots of folks would try to fool my money out of me, but all of yees wouldn't."

"I tell you what, Perletta," said Hank with mock

gravity, "some fellow will be shining up to you, proposing marriage for the sake of that nine hundred dollars — I wouldn't talk about it, if I were you."

"I ain't tole no one but the Melançons, and the Comeaus, an' the LeBlancs, an' the Thibideaus," she replied.

Hank groaned. "Oh well, I guess it don't matter. We'll try to keep you out of scrapes."

"An' I ain't likely to marry no one," she said seriously, "'cause you'd be the only one that I'd hev, an' you wouldn't hev me if I was wuth nine hundred dollars a minute."

Hank was once more overcome and speechless. "Flabbergasted," he choked in his throat, and he gazed at his admirer with a gaping mouth.

"You kin shut your mouth," she said, sarcastically, "an' quit bein' scared, for I dunno that I'd hev you, if you walleyed in the mud arter me like those pigs. Men is pigs anyway. You preten' to be so awful fond of 'Tilda Jane, an' you're allays orderin' her roun' — 'Tilda do this, an' 'Tilda do that. 'Tilda come for a ride, 'Tilda come for a walk. Ain't her young legs tired when she runs an' waits on you. Yes, men is hogs, I say, an' I prefers my hogs right down on the ground where they belong, an' where I kin drive 'em, 'stead of their drivin' me. Ole maids kin do as they likes.

There ain't no man with a stick over 'em. The harder a man says he likes a woman, the harder he bosses her. I ain't a-goin' to be no slave. I be an ole bachelor lady-maid now."

"I selfish," spluttered Hank, finding his voice at last, "I impose on 'Tilda Jane!"

"You bet you do, an' I'm thinkin' of 'doptin' her," continued Perletta grandly, "once she wanted to 'dopt me, an' you wouldn't let her, I guess. Now I'm a-goin' to 'dopt her. I've spoke of it to Mr. Waysmith, an' to ole man Whiting, an' they said all right, if she was willin'. Papers could be made out. I'd like her to be my leetle sister."

'Tilda Jane, in a rapture at Perletta's thought of her, again seized her by the hand.

The big girl put one of her own hands on her head, and with a smile that was ennobling and touching, said softly, "The other night, she crep' in my room. She knowed I'd hed money, somehow. Mind you, she didn't know but what I'd stole it. Said she, 'Perletta, I've tucked away a few dollars. You kin hev it if you want to buy anythin'.' Tears was in her eyes, an' she kissed me," added Perletta in a lower voice, "she — kissed — me — an' there ain't no one done that, sence my mother died."

Hank gave himself an impatient shake, and turned away. A new spirit had certainly come

over Perletta. She was really quite affecting, and, drawing out his handkerchief, he blew his nose violently several times. But she was speaking to him now, and he must turn round.

"Kin I 'dopt the only pusson in the world that thinks anythin' of me?" she was saying softly to him.

"No, Perletta," he replied mildly, "not with my consent. 'Tilda Jane is my adopted sister."

"You ain't hed no papers made out," said Perletta eagerly, "I'd hev writings."

"No, I've no papers," said Hank, "and it ain't because I don't approve of having things binding. If I was a man with money to settle on her, I'd have papers of adoption made out pretty quick. But s'pose my health fails, or I was to marry some witch of a thing that would chase sissy up hill and down dale — I wouldn't want her to feel bound to stay, though as long as I have health and strength, and am wise enough to remain single, I want sissy with me."

"I thought you wasn't goin' to merry," remarked Perletta disdainfully.

"Neither I am, if I can help it. I tell you, I ain't got no more idea of marrying, and no more wish for it, than those pigs have; but I've travelled. I've seen women sharp enough to catch even me, will I, or nill I. Now I'm doing my

best to keep out of their way, but s'pose one of 'em laid eyes on me. Where would I be? — and where would sissy be?"

"Then you refuses to 'dopt sissy, 'cause you're scared some woman might catch you?"

"Precisely, and I don't want you to adopt her for the same reason. There's fellows 'cute enough to trap you, Perletta, and s'pose you married one, and 'Tilda was in your house, and he wanted to get rid of her. No, we'll leave things at loose ends, and sissy can stay where she's got the pleasantest outfit."

"Ain't there no good men an' no good women near Ciscasset?" inquired Perletta, rolling her small eyes round the horizon.

"Heaps of 'em," Hank hastened to assure her, "but they don't go hunting like the foxy ones. I'd hate to be lugged off from my comfortable home."

"Ain't merriage the best thing that kin happen to man or woman?" asked Perletta gravely.

"'Course it is, I'll get married some day. It's the right thing to do, but no man wants to be driven to it before he's ready. My time ain't come yet."

Perletta turned from him, as if wearied by the conversation, and directed her attention to 'Tilda Jane, who stood breathlessly listening to them.

Suddenly, a new thought penetrated Perletta's thick pate, and her eyes twinkled. "S'pose little sissy merried herself," she suggested, "an' her husband wouldn't let you an' me live along o' her?"

The expression of 'Tilda Jane's face, and the novelty of this idea, so amused Hank in his present excited state, that he went off into one of his gales of laughter.

"Sissy marry!" he cried, stamping up and down on the grass, "Oh! my bones and body, what a drollery — bless her heart and soul, wouldn't she chivy a man about — wouldn't she dragon him, and make him stand round! Oh! hold me someone, or I'll explode."

"You great calf," ejaculated Perletta, half admiringly, half contemptuously.

"Great calf, yes," echoed Hank, "I feel young, most in my cradle. I —"

The rest of the sentence was never uttered. In his fit of merriment, he had propelled his fat frame too near the edge of the bank, and suddenly he lost his balance, and went over backward, splash into the river.

The girls screamed, and Oonah ran yelping back to the house, while Milkweed, the pigs and Poacher, always ready to join in family joy or affliction, hastened to the spot. The gallant Poacher sprang in after him, but the pigs in concern at seeing him

in their favourite wallowing place, advanced to snout him out of it.

Perletta and 'Tilda Jane, in anxiety and excitement, waded in up to their knees, then retreated shriekingly, as Hank struggled to his feet, and stood with arms extended, his whole body dripping with muddy water.

Step by step, he groped his way to the bank, the girls walking backward before him. "Oh! look at his poor head," cried 'Tilda Jane, "all plastered with black mud, and that dreadful water pouring from his face. Hank, come this way, till I wipe you off."

Hank's plunge into the river had not washed the nonsense out of him. He was still laughing convulsively, and, making lunges and plunges at the two girls, he drove them in hysterical agitation up the bank, and across the road toward the house.

Grampa, in rather a bad temper at having been left alone — a rather rare occurrence — was coming out of the yard with Handy Andy. They were going to take a walk, but hearing the confusion by the river, stopped to see what it meant.

First came Perletta and 'Tilda Jane, running and looking over their shoulders, and emitting squeals and giggles of perturbation. Behind them, groped and staggered a strange figure with muddy, dripping arms, escorted by Poacher and the pigs. Occa-

sionally, the strange figure would make a run, then would fall into a walk.

Grampa stared in amazement. Handy Andy timidly approached the curious figure to see what it was. It paused on seeing him, allowed him to sniff his way quite near, then with a watery shout, leaped forward at him, and brandished two waving arms.

Poor Andy did not stop to see whose arms they were. With one loud squeal of fright and perplexity, he ran to shelter himself behind grampa's legs.

Grampa had some time before recognized the sloppy figure, and he cried irritably, "What have you been doing with yourself, sir? You look as if you had been playing with the pigs. You had better get into the barn."

"I didn't chuck myself in the river on purpose, sir," called Hank in a conciliatory way. "'Twas an accident, and a bit of harmless fun ain't as bad as rolling home drunk at night."

"You dare to drink," said grampa wrathfully, "just let me catch you at it," and, precipitately wheeling round, he hobbled down the road, but, fast as he went, he was out-distanced by the nimble and terrified Andy.

Hank ambled into the yard, saluted the amused masons at work on the cellar, then mounted to his

"'WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING WITH YOURSELF, SIR?'"

own part of the hay loft, calling gaily to 'Tilda Jane, "Second best suit of clothes ruined, sissy, but I've had enough fun to make up for their loss."

CHAPTER XXV

HANK BREAKS IMPORTANT NEWS TO GRAMPA

"I AIN'T sharp in a business way," Hank was saying gloomily an hour later. "Now when Perletta announced her stupendous news to me, I should have said, 'Let things go on according to the old footing, till I get dad used to your transformation scene.' Instead of that, I — booby-like, said that she could at once enter on her new state. I declare that I in my name ought to be changed to a great big U. I wish women didn't always want to hurry nature — Now there's that table set for dinner with a place for Perletta, and she's helping 'Tilda Jane with the victuals out there, and keeping one eye on me to see when I'm going to tell dad. I might as well make the plunge. 'Twill be my second this morning, and the uncongenial element down below ain't half as uncongenial as dad's cold soul will be. A pity I monkeyed with Andy, but I've got to board him — that girl's eye is like a gimlet, and 'twould be poor policy to offend an 'hairless' and parlour boarder-to-be. Dad," he said aloud, and approaching the old man, "don't you

want to take off your specs and put down your paper, and talk to your son for a spell?"

"No, I don't," said grampa crossly, and burying his head more deeply in the "Ciscasset Daily Times."

"Would you take a short walk, sir, to admire the beauties of nature?" asked Hank. "The young corn down at the back of the Melançons is growing finely, and the noonday sun is shedding a lustrous glory on the farming land behind us."

"Farming fiddlesticks," said grampa decidedly.

"Sir," said Hank sharply, "come out back of the barn a spell. I want to talk business to you."

Grampa stared at him over his glasses. "Be you fooling yet?"

"No, I ain't," said Hank crossly. "Come on, father, I've got something to tell you."

The old man laid down his paper, and took up his cane. The word "business" had excited his curiosity. Hank's unfortunate reference to 'Tilda Jane as a lady following him, the night he came home, had aroused a suspicion in poor old grampa's mind that Hank was contemplating matrimony. Nothing could allay this suspicion, and it was with sudden meekness and pathos that he strove to read the enigmatical expression on Hank's face as he conducted him toward the group of lilacs at the back of the garden.

"Where are we going?" he asked submissively.

"To the bench near the pigs' bed," replied Hank. "They won't listen, and they'll keep listeners off — Look here, father," he said, when Dillson senior had seated himself on the rustic bench facing Dodge and Grappler's lair in the grass, "have you noticed anything funny about Perletta lately?"

"Oh! Perletta," exclaimed the old man in huge relief, "No, I guess not," he said indifferently, "only that she gads powerfully, and leaves the work for sissy."

"She's given me warning," said Hank solemnly, "she's going to stop being our hired girl."

"Good riddance of bad rubbish," said grampa. "She ain't the only fish in the sea."

"But 'Tilda Jane likes her," said Hank.

"She'll have to unlike her," said grampa calmly.

"Do you care to know why she's giving up her lucrative position?" asked Hank.

"Not particularly, still I'll not close my ears if you say it."

"She's come into money," said Hank with a gravity befitting the occasion.

"Money hey — how much?" sneered grampa — "two dollars or three, maybe."

"She's got nine hundred dollars a year," said Hank in the gallant tone of a champion.

"Nine hundred dollars," repeated grampa,

quickly, "who says she has nine? Ain't it nine cents?"

Hank lost patience. "I say, sir," he exclaimed, "you ain't fair. The girl's a lack-wit, but still the Lord made her, and we're bound to give her some room on His footstool — not shove her off."

"Who is shoving?" asked grampa unamiably, "I ain't, but when a hoddy-doddy tells me the moon is made of green cheese, I say, 'Prove it, prove it, and I'll believe you. Bring me down a slice. Let me stick my teeth in it. I know cheese, but I ain't going to imagine it.'"

A bright thought struck Hank. "Wait a bit, sir," he said, "I'll be back in a minute," and he ran toward the barn. "Perletta," he said, sticking his head in the little, rough house where the cooking-stove had been put up, "'Tilda Jane said you'd bought a fur coat for father — is it so?"

"Yes it's so," she said slowly.

"Would you mind if I showed it to him for an instant? I'll not let him keep it. I just want to convince him that you've got money. He's an agnostic this morning — don't know anything."

"I guess you kin do anythin' you likes with it," she said agreeably. "Make the ole man keep it, if you kin. I expec' I'll have to battle him to git him to take a present from me."

"Run get it, like a good girl," said Hank.

Perletta went with lumbering haste to her sleeping quarters, and returned with a large, cardboard box under her arm.

"An' here's a writin'" she said, extending a piece of paper to him, "ole man Whiting guv it me."

Hank took box and paper, and read aloud, "This is to certify that Miss Perletta Garraby of Ciscasset, Maine, has become the recipient of a yearly sum of nine hundred dollars, according to the will of her late uncle, Henry Garraby of Toronto, Canada. Joseph Whiting."

"You never arsked me for that," she said pointedly.

"No," replied Hank, "I believed your word; but, Perletta, we must have patience with my father. He's old, and not very strong."

"I ain't hard on him," she said patiently. "You understan's him. If you didn't jump on him once in so often, we'd all lead the dog's life."

Hank grinned, and scuttled back in the direction of the lilacs.

Grampa, still hard and unbelieving, sat leaning forward with hands crossed on the top of his cane, his old, shrewd eyes bent on the sky, as if begging for some luminary to descend to convince him of the truth of Hank's extraordinary statement about Perletta.

Hank flung the box on the seat beside him, tore

off the string, and, throwing aside tissue paper wrappings, and scattering moth balls far and near, drew out a handsome black, fur-lined coat, with a deep collar, and held it up before him. "There's a slice of the moon, sir."

Grampa looked at the coat, at Hank, at Dodge and Grappler who had drawn near, and were delightedly devouring the moth balls, then he said, "Well, it ain't green cheese."

"Sir," said Hank seriously, and he turned over the box cover, "Look here — 'March and Son, Furriers, Ciscasset.' You know the standing of that firm. Do you s'pose they'd trust a girl like Perletta, with that coat, unless she had money to pay for it?"

"It ain't worth nine hundred dollars," said grampa stubbornly.

"That girl has got her purse crammed with money," said Hank, "and she goes to see Mr. Whiting on business. You know Joseph Whiting?"

"Used to sit on the same bench with him at school," said grampa, "only he made a fortune, and I didn't. Had more brains, I s'pose. I don't know. Does he say Perletta has money?"

Hank impressively presented him with Mr. Whiting's assurance of Perletta's truthfulness.

Grampa stared at it long and earnestly. Then he

said, "It might be a forgery — I don't know — I don't say it is — still it might be."

Hank laughed irresistibly. "You know it ain't, father. How could a girl like Perletta counterfeit a signature like that? — and what would she want to do it for? — Come now, be reasonable. I haven't talked to Mr. Whiting, but Perletta tells me he's been to Canada where her uncle lived that left her the money. You'd better believe he looked into securities and all that. It's a sure thing, if he's in it."

"How did that goose girl get a rich uncle?" asked grampa contemptuously.

"Well, I don't s'pose she made him. I expect our Creator ain't above giving her rich relatives, same as He gives lots of other poor folks."

"It's a fine coat," said grampa, caressing the fur of the garment that Hank had thrown on the seat beside him. "Must have cost a good bit over a hundred dollars. She'll look like a fool in it, though."

"It's for you," roared Hank, "and may I be forgiven for saying it, but you don't deserve it."

"For me," said grampa, mildly, "surely not — she don't like me."

"Yes she does, poor girl," said Hank wrathfully. "She's ignorant, and she's ugly, but she has human feelings. She's all alone in the world, and she's

pining for some one to hang on to. She wants to adopt sissy. I s'pose if we'd let her have her, she'd take her and those pigs, and set up housekeeping for herself."

"She ain't going to have sissy," remarked grampa in alarm, "she can have the pigs," and he poked them contemptuously with his stick, "if they ain't dead from eating them poison-smelling things."

"Oh, my soul!" cried Hank, and, going on his knees, he wrestled with Dodge and Grappler, to dislodge the moth balls already in their mouths, and, seeing he could not do it, he rapidly picked up those remaining on the ground.

"What's in them, dad — s'pose they die? Won't I catch it?"

"There's tar in 'em, and camphor, and crude carbolic acid," said grampa slightingly, "but I fear there ain't enough of the latter to carry 'em off."

"We'll hope for the best," said Hank with a sigh — "they're pretty tough — now dad, to come back to business. Perletta wants to go on living with us, but as a boarder. We'll have to get another girl. The question is, are you willing. If you're going to raise Cain about it, she'll have to get out."

"I've no objection to her staying," said grampa, coolly, "if she'll pay good board, and keep herself quiet."

"She'll have to come to the table with us."

"Not while I'm alive," said grampa, bringing his stick down firmly on the ground. "When I'm dead, you can have all the idiot asylums, and states' prisons you like at the table. I won't care."

"Boarders don't usually pay high board, and live in the kitchen," said Hank drily, "at least if they have, I ain't heard of the custom."

"The kitchen is good enough for her," said grampa, shortly, "or the cook-house now that we've no kitchen. Give her an inch, and she'll take an ell. In my old school books there was a story of a rabbit that borrowed her neighbour's home. She got in, and they never could get her out."

"Mr. Waysmith advised her to board with us," remarked Hank diplomatically.

"Mr. Waysmith," said grampa, haughtily, "and what has the likes of Perletta to do with Mr. Waysmith?"

"She went to him, and he ain't too proud and mighty to advise a poor servant girl in want of a friend."

"Mr. Waysmith is his own master," said grampa, tranquilly, "I ain't got no jurisdiction over him."

"But what will he say when he hears that you have refused the poor girl's request?" asked Hank, keenly. "Won't his good opinion of you suffer?"

Grampa showed his first signs of weakening. "I

ain't refused anything. Let her board, and give good money to help with the housekeeping. I don't care. She can have a little table in the corner of the dining-room if she likes. It don't matter to me."

"She's got to sit right down with us," said Hank, decidedly.

Grampa stared up at the sky, and hummed a hard little tune.

"I see what it is," remarked Hank with pretended desperation, "I've got to get married. A woman at the head of this house would keep things straight. No one minds me, and you're going to break up the family, for, if Perletta goes, 'Tilda Jane will fall ill of worry, and maybe die."

Grampa's stubborn old mind was shaken to its foundations.

"A daughter-in-law is a whip that I can always crack over his poor old head, when he's too ugly," Hank muttered.

"Son," grampa was saying in a shaky voice, "married life is a dog's life."

"I'm getting quite fond of dogs," said Hank shrewdly.

"There was only one woman worth marrying, and I got her," grampa continued dejectedly.

"Now, dad," said Hank firmly, "you know you're saying what ain't so. Ciscasset is chock full

of nice girls looking for husbands, and there's more out in the country. I know a girl, out Karakunk way, that's a good girl and a smart girl. I've only to hold out a finger, and she'll come, and she'd take good care of you too."

Grampa was so overcome, and so frightened that he went all to pieces. His old hands were trembling, though he leaned hard on his cane to steady himself.

"Son," he said in a voice that was smooth and mellifluous, "I guess Perletta might stay. I got a turn against her for running off with my pup, but I ain't blind. I see there's a change in her. She ain't so ugly."

"Good for you, dad," and Hank gave him a resounding and affectionate slap on the back. "I thought you'd come round — and dad, I want you to understand this. I'm not one to make you do anything against your own interests. You know I think a lot of sissy, and I'm beginning to tolerate Perletta, but the both of 'em rolled together don't count with me as much as you do. You're my father — see?"

"Give me your arm, son," said grampa blandly, "and we'll walk to the barn together. I'll tell Perletta she can stay if she behaves herself — see those pigs are trying to keep Andy from going to their bed. Let him smell round it, if he wants to."

To please his father, Hank made a great show of forcing Dodge and Grappler to abandon the determined attitude they had taken, namely, that Handy Andy should not inspect their freshly made straw bed.

The mischievous little dog scampered over the bed, bit and pulled at the straw, then, leaving the indignant pigs to re-arrange it, he scuttled after grampa and Hank.

"What about the coat, sir?" asked Hank glancing at the parcel he carried in his hand. "Perletta said you could keep it now if you liked."

"Give it back to her," said grampa, gently, "cold weather hasn't come. When it does, we'll see. It's powerful handsome. 'Twould become me."

Hank, with some trepidation, watched his father approaching the cook-house.

Perletta stuck her red face out, when she saw him coming, and set her teeth for contempt, patronage, or whatever was to come.

"Perletta," said grampa, shortly, "my son says you wish to board with us. I'm agreeable to it, if you'll hold yourself ready to leave at any time, if it shouldn't be convenient to keep you."

So far, so good, and Hank breathed easily, while Perletta flushed with pleasure. "I'll not give much trouble, sir," she stammered, "I'm pleased to bide. You seems like home folks here — all of yees."

"You've got to be in early nights," said grampa, strictly, "and not gad too much."

"Oh! powers of contrariness," muttered Hank, "Dad would empty all the boarding-houses in the state in about ten minutes."

"And not have too much company," grampa was continuing, "and not be sassy, and keep the pigs out of the way of strangers as much as possible."

"Yes, sir," said Perletta, but not quite as meekly as she had spoken before.

"And if you have callers, keep them in the kitchen."

"What about the new girl?" asked Perletta, brusquely, "where'll she take her callers?"

"In the wood-house," replied grampa, promptly.

Perletta frowned, and Hank, to effect a diversion, surreptitiously kicked over a pot of soup that had been set outside the cook-house.

'Tilda Jane and Perletta both sprang to it in dismay, and grampa's lecture was cut short.

Mumbling to himself, he went to sit down in his big chair, and think over this last domestic problem.

When dinner time came, he waved a hand grandly toward Perletta's place at the table. Hank was suffering from suppressed laughter, but sobered himself, at a beseeching look from 'Tilda Jane.

Perletta, contrary to his expectations, scarcely opened her mouth during the meal, except to eat.

Grampa kept a sharp eye on her, all ready to jump verbally, if she did anything out of the way. She neither put her knife in her mouth, nor smacked her lips. "The girl's got more sense than he thinks," Hank reflected, surveying his father from under his eyelids. "She's watching sissy like a cat, and is doing whatever she does. She'll talk in time, but just now, she's too overcome by the grandeur of her situation to do anything but hold her tongue. I wonder how she'll put in her time now, and I wonder what Mr. Waysmith had in mind when he said he had a plan about someone to teach her? A big thing like that could never go to school and sit in the infant class."

CHAPTER XXVI

A COTTAGE OF GENTILITY

One evening, three weeks after Perletta had been boarding in the Dillson family, grampa announced his intention of going for a drive.

"I'm sorry, dad, I can't take you," said Hank, "there's a fellow coming to see me soon after supper, and I said I'd be round the barn somewhere."

"I can drive myself," said grampa stoutly.

"You can, but you can't," replied Hank mildly. "Do you think I'd trust you to those rheumatic hands in case of an accident? No sir, you're too valuable yet to lose. You'll have to take one of the girls."

Grampa looked first at 'Tilda Jane, then at Perletta. He would rather have the little girl, but the big girl was a better driver, and was stronger to hold in the powerful Milkweed.

"Perletta," he said shortly, "you will go with me."

Hank winked at Poacher, who, at the mention of a drive, had stood on his hind legs, and was

pawing the young man's chest. "Dad's a funny fellow, isn't he?" he said in the dog's ear. "Orders a boarder round like a coachman, and the boarder don't mind — Come on, help me harness."

When grampa and Perletta drove down the road half an hour later, in Hank's neat black buggy, with Handy Andy tucked in between them, and Poacher running behind, Hank turned to 'Tilda Jane with one of his explosive laughs. "Isn't that dad a great case. 'Pon my word, I believe he's getting fond of Perletta."

'Tilda Jane's eyes were twinkling. "Does money always make such a difference?" she asked. "I mean does it always make folks nice?"

"I guess usually it makes 'em horrider," he said, "but certainly, in Perletta's case, it has toned her down wonderful. She don't see a fight now, unless it hugs her so tight she can't get away from it."

"She doesn't seem so ugly looking, either," said the little girl, pausing in her occupation of washing out cuptowels to gaze thoughtfully at the sunny, western sky.

"It's her expression that has changed," said Hank. "When she used to roll out that under lip she was a sight — I say, sissy, you'll worry those things all to rags scrubbing 'em like that. Hang the things out on the line, and come sit down, and look at the new house."

"Very well," she said, laconically, and, hanging out her towels, and carefully pouring the soapy water on some nasturtiums planted in a tub to keep them out of Handy Andy's way, she followed Hank to a seat on the small grass plot in front of their new house.

The frame was up now, and boarded in. The carpenters were doing their work faithfully, and Hank never tired in his minute supervision of every detail.

"It's going to be a pretty snug nest," he said admiringly, "now ain't it, 'Tilda? I tell you by November we'll be glad to sit round a good fire inside those walls."

'Tilda Jane smiled, and, drawing a roll of knitting from her apron pocket, began to heel one of grampa's woolen socks.

"I am getting this ready for winter," she said holding it up.

Hank looked round about them at the luxuriant vegetation of gardens, roadside, and river bank. This was a fertile little spot, one of the most fertile by the Ciscasset River, and it seemed strange, in the glowing beauty of this summer evening, to be thinking of winter storms and cold.

"Hank," said 'Tilda Jane, suddenly, "who are the Torraines?" and, as she spoke, her eyes went from her knitting across the green hedge separating

them from their neighbour's house on the left — the Dollivers' pretty cottage.

Hank always called it "the cottage of gentility," and was in the habit of quoting in its connection, Southey's lines in "The Devil's Walk."

> "He passed a cottage with a double coach-house,
> A cottage of gentility,
> And he owned with a grin,
> That his favourite sin
> Is pride that apes humility."

It certainly had a large stable, and carriage-house, and it certainly had been occupied mostly by broken down gentlefolks. Captain Dolliver and his wife, who were going to leave it, had been what Hank called, "army folks and stuck-up." They rarely associated with their neighbours, and the Dillsons had been glad to hear that they were to move away and live with a son.

"The Torraines," repeated Hank, when 'Tilda Jane asked him the question, "the Torraines — bless the child, if anyone knows about them, your humble servant ought to — When their father died, Mr. Waysmith was left sole executor with precious little to execute, but there's a great to-do made about what there is, and he often sends me there on errands."

"Is there a large family?" inquired 'Tilda Jane.

"Medium sissy, medium," and he smiled in amusement. "First, there's Aunt Melindy, the head of the family — a glorious old maid of sixty, with one tiny crack in her worn-out brain. I was waiting for her in the parlour the other day, and opened a book of bird pictures. She ran in screaming, and slammed the pages together, saying the birds would all fly away if I left the book open."

"I daresay that worried her," said 'Tilda Jane, soberly.

"'Course it did, but she is such a good old soul that she soon forgave me. They're poor, you know, and she tries to save — has only one tooth left in her head, carries the rest round tied up in a corner of her handkerchief, hoping that a day will come when she can afford a set of artificials."

"What a sore thing that must be," said 'Tilda Jane, "can't any of her friends give her some teeth?"

"She wouldn't have 'em, sissy. She's proud in her way."

"Who are the rest of the family?" asked the young girl curiously.

"Next to the aunt comes her nephew Bertrand. He paints a little, plays a little, but don't bring in the dollars. They call him, down town, 'The general purpose young saphead, with the muskrat income, and sealskin ambitions.'"

"You might give him the job of painting the new house," said 'Tilda Jane benevolently.

Hank hung his head over the back of the seat, and began to laugh softly. "I can see myself offering Bertrand Torraine the job of painting our house. Wouldn't he stare a paralyzing stare? He paints pictures, sissy, not houses."

"And he has a sister, hasn't he?" asked 'Tilda Jane, dropping her knitting, and holding out her arms to Oonah who was trying to crawl on her lap.

"A sister, yes — the dancing star — Denise the will-o'-the-wisp — the admired of all the idle young fellows about town."

"Is she idle, too?"

"No — I don't think so. She's a gay, tricksy sort of girl, gives music lessons to help out their income. She's engaged to rich young Verriker, but his folks ain't willing for him to marry her, 'cause she's poor. I don't know how'll they'll figure it out."

"Is that all the family?" asked 'Tilda Jane.

"No, there's a baby, half sister to Denise and Bertrand — the 'cutest thing about two and a half years old. Won't talk a word, but tells you everything in dumb show. Then, beside the baby, there's the servant girl, old Phizelle Merrithew, the glummest, foxiest old party in Maine — looks me up

and down as if she didn't know how to class me, calls me 'that young man.'"

"Isn't there anyone else in the family?"

"No, except the dog, Merry Wags — what are you so particular about knowing all I have to say of the Torraines?"

"'Cause they're coming to live in that house," said 'Tilda Jane solemnly, and she pointed to the Dollivers' cottage.

"You don't mean to say so?" exclaimed Hank, abandoning his lolling attitude, and sitting up straighter, "The Torraines are?"

"Yes, Mr. Waysmith was here to-day with a young lady going over the cottage. I was away, and you were away, but he saw grampa and Perletta, and he said the young lady would be willing to teach Perletta anything she wanted to know."

"Well I declare, that beats me," exclaimed Hank.

"And Perletta said there was a little child with them," continued 'Tilda Jane with deep feeling, "and it had blue eyes and curly hair. Just think, Hank, of living next door to what I've longed for all my life."

"They're all as pretty as a picture," said Hank, "except Aunt Melindy and Phizelle — I say, that's a great thing for Perletta to have a young lady like Miss Torraine teach her."

"Do you think Perletta will ever make much of herself, Hank?" asked 'Tilda Jane, wistfully.

Hank looked all round him, as if fearful that someone might overhear. "Do you know what dad said to me last night about her? Said he, 'You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear' — Not elegant, but puts the case."

"And what did you say?" asked the little girl, shrewdly.

"Said I, 'Dad, you can make silk purses out of anything nowadays. There ain't no limit to human ingenuity.'"

'Tilda Jane smiled, "But now, Hank, do you really and truly think that Perletta could ever be what she wants to be — a real lady?"

"She can be a real lady, as far as goodness and proper behaviour goes," said Hank, "for she's certainly improving fast, but she's got to get that silly idea of having white hands knocked out of her head, and I guess the dancing star is just the one to knock it out. She'll razzle dazzle you, till you don't know where you are."

"I have no idea of being anything but a good housekeeper," said 'Tilda Jane, steadily, "and loving my neighbour, and not being tricky, and trying to eat right, and act right, and not have to fight. A jumpy life frightens me."

Hank tittered. "You can fight, in the open or in the underbrush, if you're hard pressed, but you don't enjoy it. I'll tell you what, 'Tilda, it would be a fine thing if Miss Torraine would teach you with Perletta. You'd like it better than going to school, and she's had a fine education, I know, for I've seen the bills."

"I'd love that," said 'Tilda Jane with ill-concealed joy. "Is she fresh from school?"

"Yes, she's only nineteen. She's been in New York, and Europe, and I don't know where. I guess Mr. Waysmith must have paid for it all. He and her father were great chums. 'Tilda, we'll find out about this teaching when Miss Torraine comes, but mind now, you go slow when they move in. I'm scared of these falling 'ristocrats. They're like mules, and often give you a kick when you least expect it. You've a good heart, and will be inclined to trot over with offers of help. You let me run things."

"All right, Hank," said the young girl, meekly.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE TORRAINES

The Torraines had come, and were about settled in their new quarters — settled as much as persons of their Bohemian characteristics ever could be settled.

Hank avoided them consistently, but he was secretly in a state of absolute content and delight at their proximity.

The summer was now nearly over, the new house was completed all but the finishing touches, and one Saturday afternoon he was roaming from room to room, his old clothes on, a cap on the back of his head, the expression of his face beatific and intense.

"They say all folks have cares," he was soliloquizing, "I ain't got one. Maybe some are on the way, but I hope not — I say, they're having an uncommon gay time over there," and he approached one of the windows that overlooked the Torraines' lawn.

It was a pretty lawn, green, and fresh, and extensive for so small a house, and, in the centre, was a group of trees. Under these trees, a small table was set.

"Afternoon tea," continued Hank. "Scarcely heard of such a thing till these folks came. According to them, it's as important as breakfast, dinner or supper."

At the table sat Miss Torraine, pouring tea in tiny cups, while her brother stood waiting to pass them to their guests.

"My land!" Hank went on, "if she ain't got all my family over there, even to Dodge and Grappler who are goggling through the hedge."

They were indeed all there. Grampa sat in a cushioned chair, a broad smile on his face, while the tiny Lola, the baby of the family, danced and pantomimed before him. So clever a mimic was the child, that Hank could plainly understand the story she was telling. An hour before, Hank had seen two men stop their buggies in front of the cottage of gentility, jump out, and proceed to make a bargain in trading horses. The baby was going through the whole thing in pantomime. She pulled up an imaginary horse with a jerk of her pink fists, sprang out of an imaginary buggy, slapped her crossed fingers in the palm of her hand, and pointed to an imaginary pocket. She imitated first one

man, then the other. One made his bargain with his feet far apart, the other stood with his close together. Finally the affair was closed, she paid out an imaginary sum of money, sprang into an imaginary buggy, and drove away.

Grampa was cackling delightedly, and was the baby's only spectator, for the others were so used to her tricks that they scarcely paid any attention to her.

'Tilda Jane and Perletta sat side by side, both very stiff and very proper. They were fresh from their lesson with the erratic young lady, who took them at all hours of the day, sometimes not till late at night.

"But they always get their instruction, I notice," murmured Hank, "if she keeps them till midnight — ain't Perletta a peacock? She thinks she's got one of her big feet in sassiety. My good girl, everyone ain't as frolicsome and easy-going as that yellow-haired young lady — What's Aunt Melindy doing?"

He burst out laughing. A man with a hurdy-gurdy had come along the road, and, seeing this gay party on the lawn, was favouring them with his whole repertoire. Aunt Melinda, inspired by the sound of the music, had set her cup of tea on the grass, and, catching up her skirts, had begun dancing up and down and across the lawn.

Baby Lola, not to be outdone, seized her little frilled petticoats, and tripped to and fro on her tiny toes, followed by her barking fox-terrier, Merry Wags, Poacher, and Handy Andy, while Oonah peeped timidly from behind 'Tilda Jane's chair, and emitted faint yelps of excitement.

"There's Mr. Hank," called Miss Torraine's merry voice suddenly, "I see him spying at us from an upper window. Bertrand, please go bring him down. It's a shame for him to be alone this lovely afternoon — a holiday, too."

The young man in the white flannel suit, turned round, caught sight of the skulking Hank, deposited the cup he was holding on the table, and with a dancing step that kept time to the music, hurried toward his neighbour's house.

"Come on over," he said after he had run nimbly upstairs, and had cornered Hank.

"I can't — I've on my old clothes."

"Never mind that, we're not slaves to fashion."

"You must excuse me," said Hank firmly.

Bertrand took him by the arm. "Look here, old fellow," he said gravely, "ever since we came to this house, you've overwhelmed us with favours. You've lent us things, let your adopted sister give us drives, and my sister thinks it very odd that you don't come and call. Go change your clothes

if you don't want to come this way. I will wait for you."

"I can't go," said Hank, but his tone was weakening.

"I'll sit here till you're ready," said Bertrand coolly, and, drawing out a little pocket mirror he began to arrange his mustache.

Hank grinned, and fled down the staircase, saying, "I'll be back in a minute."

He donned his best suit of clothes in his quarters in the barn, and was speedily back again.

Bertrand escorted him over to the lawn, and Miss Torraine held out a friendly hand to him from behind the tea table.

"Come here neighbour, sit by me, and I will give you a cup of tea."

"How's all your care?" asked Hank politely, after she had put the cup in his hand.

"Oh! this family is all quite well," said Miss Torraine with a smile.

"You sound as merry as crickets," Hank went on.

"We're all young in our ways in this house," she said, with a shake of her light head, "all but Phizelle," she added, as the elderly maid appeared in the doorway of the house.

"Some more hot water, Phizelle," — then she continued, "Look at aunt there," and she nodded

toward the old lady who had sunk on the grass in a state of exhaustion. "One would think she was twenty."

"How is Perletta getting on with her studies?" asked Hank, glancing toward the big girl who sat a little way from them, still in her condition of solemn content.

"Progressively," said Miss Torraine gaily, "you can't make a bird of paradise out of a State of Maine barn fowl in a day."

"But will the fowl ever make the bird of paradise?" he asked keenly.

The girl shrugged her shoulders. "I doubt it."

"Then is it worth while to try?"

"What else could you do? You don't want to destroy the poor fowl's illusions. Let her learn by experience."

"If you're contented to try to improve her plumage, I'm agreeable," said Hank. "It's none of my business anyway, but I'm glad of the chance to thank you for the pains you're taking with 'Tilda."

"'Tilda Jane is delicious," said the girl in a low voice. "Her ambitions are sensible and pathetic. Perletta is different. I just scream over her. I wouldn't have missed teaching her for a kingdom. By the way, she says you want a new maid as soon as you move in your house. Phizelle has a niece

in the country who wishes to come to town. Would you try her?"

"Is she an orphan?" asked Hank anxiously.

"I don't know. Why do you ask?"

"Well, I don't much hanker for more orphans."

"Phizelle," said the young lady, "is your niece an orphan?"

"Her pa and ma was livin' last week," said Phizelle gloomily.

"Then we'll try her," said Hank cheerily. "Let us know when she comes, and we'll see her."

"Look at that child, Hank," cried 'Tilda Jane suddenly, as she sat with adoring eyes fixed on the beautiful Lola.

The little one was walking in a stiff dignified manner over the lawn.

"Mr. Waysmith is somewhere near," said Miss Torraine.

Her remark was superfluous, for everyone saw that the amusing child was mimicking the walk of their friend the merchant. She had caught sight of him away down the road, and, in a flash, her slow walk turned into a run, and she scampered down the road to meet him, and the dilatory Muffles.

"He is a good man," said Hank under his breath, as his employer appeared at the gate.

"Yes," replied Miss Torraine who had caught his remark, "and he is so reticent about his good-

ness that he is often misunderstood. Look at the expression of his face. Isn't it like, 'Bless you, my children'?"

"It is," said Hank, getting up, and standing a little aside, as Mr. Waysmith came up the walk.

A few minutes later, the Dillson family, "humans and dogs," as Hank said, were wending their way home.

"Hank," said 'Tilda Jane, "isn't there something in the Bible about it being a pleasant thing for brethren to dwell together in unity?"

"I guess there is, sissy, it sounds familiar."

"We're all happy now," said the little girl contentedly, "and I don't believe our family boat is going to run against any more snags, though, maybe, as Perletta is settled, we ought to adopt another orphan."

Hank stopped short, and planted both feet firmly on the path. "Now look here, 'Tilda, enough is as good as a feast. I've helped comfort two orphans. I've done my duty, and we'll draw the line there."

The little girl laughed mischievously, and added, "Except orphan dogs. You don't know how many Mr. Waysmith may fetch us."

"There ain't so much responsibility about dogs," said Hank with determination. "There is with humans. They've got souls — Excuse me, I must

give dad an arm to his bower. He's walking a bit shaky."

"He's laughing at something Perletta has said," replied 'Tilda Jane. "Hank — I'll never stop being glad that you let me bring another orphan girl here."

"I wouldn't undo it exactly," said Hank, "but as I said before, we'll close the series with this one. What with me, and grampa, and Perletta, not to mention the dogs and other critters, you have enough orphans on your hands now. So, long life to all of 'Tilda Jane's orphans, and may Perletta be the last!"

"That's for Providence to say," murmured the little girl. "I wouldn't dare take that stand."

THE END.

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